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Catholic Christianity and The Modern World

A Course of Sermons

By

Rev. K. Krogh-Tonning, D.D.

Translated from the Revised German Edition
by
A. M. Buchanan, M.A. (London)

NEW YORK
JOSEPH F. WAGNER (Inc.)
LONDON: B. HERDER

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REMIGIUS LAFORT, D.D.

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Imprimatur

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Archbishop of New York

LOAN

New York, September 16, 1916

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EDITOR'S PREFACE

THE wide renown for learning and pulpit eloquence which Dr. Krogh-Tonning gained in the many years of his activity as pastor of a leading Protestant church in Christiania, caused the event of his return to the Catholic Church to attract a great deal of attention.

After his conversion Dr. Krogh-Tonning published a number of apologetic works, of which we offer here the one which, in the original as well as in its French and German versions, became most widely known.

The popularity and esteem which this work enjoys in its various foreign editions induced the present English version, which, it is hoped, will be received as a useful addition to our apologetic literature.

In his preface to the original, the author stated as the aim of his work the endeavour "to awaken and strengthen the consciousness of all that which unites Christians in the combat against the common enemy: modern unbelief."

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CATHOLIC CHRISTIANITY AND THE MODERN WORLD

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

IS IT A FACT THAT GOD TAKES THE WILL FOR THE DEED?

"Amen I say to you, this poor widow hath cast in more than all they who have cast into the treasury."—Mark xii, 43.

Many rich people had cast large contributions into the treasury, without receiving any particular praise from our Lord, but, when the poor widow approached and offered a trifling gift, He commended her highly, for her desire to give much, not because she actually did so. Her desire is revealed in the fact that she gave all that for the moment she possessed—"her whole living," as our Saviour said. Her deed was, in itself, unimportant, but her will was very good, and it is in goodness of the will that God delights. We often hear people say that God takes the will for the deed; and in one sense this is true, but the truth is frequently misunderstood and wrongly applied, and so it behooves us to examine this saying carefully and discover its real meaning.

1. Occasionally we are told that our outward actions have in themselves no significance at all; everything depends solely upon the intention or will, that if only the aim in view is good, God does not care whether or no the action performed is good. Surely this is a very dangerous theory; any one may persuade himself that he has good intentions, and that therefore it does not much matter in God's sight if he neglects to do what is obviously his duty, or if he actually does something that is wrong. There may be some truth in all this, but at the same time there is great risk of self-

deception. St. Paul did indeed say: "The good which I will, I do not, but the evil which I will not, that I do," and he consoled himself by thinking: "Now if I do that which I will not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me" (Rom. vii, 19, 20). The Apostle had a right to console himself thus, because he was a very great saint; but are we, ordinary mortals, justified in making excuses of this kind for our own lives, so poor in good works and so full of evil? St. Paul knew for certain that his will was good, and therefore he was free from anxiety, but have we no doubts on the subject?

Let us beware of deceiving ourselves. Let us rather acknowledge that our deficiency in really good works is due, as a rule, to our will, which is unhappily not always good, or is, at least, lamentably weak and wavering. Evil desires are, on the contrary, only too strong, and we yield to them readily enough. Have we a right, such being the case, to console ourselves with the thought that God takes the will for the deed? Such an idea is almost an insult to Him, and we should do better to cry out with St. Paul: "Unhappy man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

Is it possible for a well-to-do man, when he sees his brother in want, and refuses to help him, to plead in excuse that he had really felt sorrow for his neighbor's misfortunes, and so had a good will? What does it avail for a drunkard or a debauchee to say to himself: "I desire to lead a decent life; I feel how much better it would be; but God will be satisfied with my good will, and take it instead of the deed"? Everyone will agree in pronouncing arguments of this kind to be blasphemous perversions of the saying that God takes the will for the deed.

In these cases the will is fundamentally bad, but even if it is really good, it is by no means a matter of indifference whether the

will is realized in action, or is frustrated and rendered unfruitful. It is important for us to notice that the more we wish to do what is right, the better will our actions become; and, conversely, the more we succeed in doing right, the stronger will be our will. Well doing confirms us in good, strengthens our will, procures for us much true happiness and imparts fresh energy for good works.

Supposing, however, that our will is directed to evil, what are we to think? Some people tell us that all depends on the will, and when this is evil, it matters little whether or no evil actions proceed from it; that from the moral point of view it is indifferent whether a wicked deed is accomplished, or the evil desire remains ineffective. Such persons condemn a man who desires, but does not do evil, as severely as one who both has the evil desire and carries it into effect.

This condemnation seems to testify to a very high moral standpoint, but is it invariably correct? Sometimes outward respectability, which deters men from dishonesty, is held up to ridicule, as being utterly worthless. In his indignation at this proceeding, a worthy old man once exclaimed: "If all that we hear about outward respectability is true, no respectable person can go to heaven." Of course it is true that no one, who cares *exclusively* for outward appearances, can claim admission to the Kingdom of God; but is a worldly-minded man, who leads an outwardly blameless life, as bad as another, who does not attempt to restrain or suppress his evil passions? Surely not; our own instinct tells us that this is impossible. It is with the utmost pain that a Christian father or mother sees a child go astray, but it makes a great difference to them whether their son continues to be outwardly respectable, or abandons himself to every imaginable vice. As a rule, one who puts some restraint upon his evil passions, and does not allow them

to manifest themselves in action, is better than another, who lets them run riot. The former exerts some amount of moral force, and so stands on a higher level than the latter. This is one reason, but there is also another: Just as doing right strengthens the will in what is good, so doing wrong strengthens its tendency to evil. The first time that a man commits a crime, his hand trembles and his heart beats fast, but the second time he feels less emotion, and ends perhaps by feeling none at all, for he is hardened in his wickedness. This is a disastrous result of wrong-doing, and proves plainly what a mistake it is to regard external actions as of no importance.

2. What truth is there, then, in the saying that God takes the will for the deed? Let us examine it with reference both to a good and a bad intention.

The saying is fully and literally true in cases when the will is really good, but circumstances preclude all possibility of carrying out our good intentions. This was obviously the case with the poor widow in the Temple. What she did was very little; she would gladly have done more, but was prevented by her extreme poverty. Our Lord recognized her good will, and, taking it for the deed, commended her generosity. If you are sure that your will is good, and sure too that you cannot accomplish your good intentions, although you honestly desire to do so, you are justified in consoling yourself with the thought that God takes the will for the deed.

Humble Christians do not, however, derive much comfort from this argument, being always uncertain as to the goodness of their will. A weak will, provided that it aims at what is good, is a good will, and our Lord must frequently be satisfied with good works that are few in number, because the will is not perfectly decided and steadfast. A weak will resembles a weak faith, and we know that

Christ had compassion on the man who said: "I do believe, Lord; help my unbelief" (Mark ix, 23). In the same way He will accept a will that is good, but weak. What He condemns is, not the weak, but the evil will, and so great is God's mercy, that the good will, though weak, is taken for the deed.

The same *may* be the case with an evil will. Many a man goes scot free, who is inwardly far more corrupt than a criminal suffering the punishment of his sins. God sees his heart, and perceives his will to be altogether directed to wickedness, although fear of detection deters him from outwardly criminal actions. Many a one goes about with his heart full of the foulest impurity, so that only the dread of public disgrace saves him from actual immorality. Hence publicans and sinners may enter the kingdom of heaven more readily than a self-righteous Pharisee.

If you are uneasy with regard to your will and actions, follow the publican's example, and pray humbly: "God be merciful to me, a sinner." Pray in the same spirit in the house of God, and seek there forgiveness for all your sins. Approach the altar and receive the most holy Body and Blood of Christ to strengthen your wayward and uncertain will, and then go forth to fight the good fight of faith, being sure that you will obtain the promised victory.

TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

HAPPINESS

"The kingdom of heaven is like unto a treasure hidden in a field, which a man having found, hid it, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field."—Matt. xiii, 44.

The evangelist tells us of a treasure that brings happines to its owner.

1. What kind of treasure is it? We could easily find thousands of people who, although they are very rich, never enjoy a day's happiness. They have everything that would make life comfortable, calm and pleasant, but they have never found peace of heart; and realize the truth of Job's words: "The life of man upon earth is a warfare, and his days are like the days of a hireling. As a servant longeth for the shade, as the hireling looketh for the end of his work, so I also have had empty months, and have numbered to myself wearisome nights" (Job vii, 1-3). These people may have the means of procuring every luxury, the daintiest food, the most expensive amusements at home and abroad, and of seeing all the most beautiful things in the world, but after all they are dissatisfied, weary of life and incapable of enjoying anything. They discover many things on their way, but nowhere do they feel happy and contented. They are treated with much respect, and are praised in newspapers and periodicals, but they are never light-hearted; they are always depressed and miserable. Such persons are apt to put an end to their own lives, so overpowering is their discontent.

Everyone acknowledges that this is a strange state of mind, but it is not everyone who reflects that such a disposition affords abso-

lute proof of the incapacity of earthly and temporal possessions to render their owners happy.

This is a fact of the utmost importance; we may almost venture to say that the misery now prevalent is to a great extent due to men's failure to appreciate this truth. As Christians, we cannot be blind or indifferent to want and suffering, and therefore we cannot stand aloof from the efforts now being made to remove these sources of unhappiness. Some of the most capable and energetic churchmen of our own day have lavished prayers and labor in trying to avert the evils of modern society. That they have done so is an honor to the Catholic Church, and their exertions are recognized even by those who feel for her nothing but hostility. In social work our antagonists start with a completely mistaken theory. They are anxious to promote the welfare of the masses, but they regard the possession of earthly happiness as the sole means of accomplishing this end. They consider man only in the natural, and not in the supernatural order, and as long as they look at things from this unfortunate point of view, the social question will remain for them an insoluble problem, and poverty will continue to be felt an intolerable burden by all who aim exclusively at the acquisition of temporal goods.

It is a mistake to suppose that true happiness consists in the fleeting prosperity of this world—a mistake likely to result in bitter disappointment, despondency, discontent, envy, hatred and revolutionary designs on the part of the turbulent masses, who no longer toil to acquire imperishable wealth, because they have ceased to believe in it.

The experience of every generation shows that true happiness is not to be obtained by means of what is temporal and worldly. In the history of the Church we read of many who renounced all

their possessions and lived in poverty, without ever missing their riches. They toiled and ate the bread of the poor, without ever longing for costly banquets. They dedicated their lives to the service of the needy, without uttering a word of complaint at their lack of all comfort. They endured scorn, persecution and calumny, and in lowliness and peace of heart submitted to the abuse and ill-treatment of their neighbors. They allowed themselves to be misjudged and condemned by men incapable of understanding them, and received nothing in return for their good works but hatred, which they repaid with love. In silence they suffered the storm of persecution to break over them, and were content to pray for their ignorant persecutors. And in this life of charity and prayer they enjoyed a happiness that was proof against all adversity.

Is it not strange that such a thing is not only possible, but actually took place?

Perhaps many of us have never considered at all what this remarkable fact proves. It shows beyond all question that, hidden from the eyes of the multitude, like the treasure buried in the field, and incomprehensible to the vast majority of mankind, there is something capable of affording happiness, but this world can never bestow it, nor take it away from one who is fortunate enough to possess it.

What is this treasure? St. Paul tells us that it is not meat and drink, but justice and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost (Rom. xiv, 17). If you hunger and thirst after happiness, you may search the whole world over without discovering any treasure more sure to produce it than justice, peace and joy. With them you would be happy, and lifted far above all the misery and suffering of this life. If you are *just* in the sight of God, through the grace of Jesus Christ, you will not be troubled if the world look askance at you

and treat you as a malefactor. If you are at *peace* with God, you possess happiness of which the world can never rob you, for you will care nothing for its opinion. Its poisonous shafts may injure your body, but they cannot disturb your soul. You may see your earthly prosperity fade away, since this is dependent upon the judgment and friendship of men, but we must not rely upon these things, if we understand what real happiness is; and every Christian can shake himself free from their trammels, if only he keeps his eyes fixed on the priceless glory of his heavenly treasure.

When once you have experienced joy in the Holy Ghost, you possess a source of happiness for which the world would envy you, could it appreciate its value. Even the sacrifices demanded by obedience and self-denial afford joy, for there is an exquisite delight in being permitted to suffer and give up anything in order to obey and serve God rather than man.

2. Where is this treasure to be found? In the Kingdom of Heaven. This is the name with which Christ often honored His Church. Yes, the Church is the guardian of His words and Sacraments, which are the visible means whereby the treasures of the kingdom are conveyed to us. The man in the parable, having once discovered the treasure, dug no further, for he knew where it lay. The merchant risked nothing in buying the pearl of great price. And—thank God—we too need not grope in the darkness; we are not left to our own feelings and fancies. It is true that many are guided by such things in their search for happiness, and, as a result, they never discover it, for they never emerge from darkness and uncertainty. If your search is to be successful, abandon your own ideas, lay no stress upon your own fickle emotions, but follow our Lord's guidance and He will show you where the treasure is hidden. Go to the throne of grace, that He established in His

Church, and there you will find deliverance from all your sins. Go to the Holy Table, and you will find peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, because Jesus Christ, the source of all peace and joy, gives Himself to us there with His innermost life and with all the strength of the world to come.

3. What does the treasure cost?—Like the merchant in the parable, we must give up everything in order to purchase it. But be sure that what we give up is only what we possess as children of this world; it will lose all value in your sight when you have acquired the treasures of God's kingdom. Give up your sensual appetites, that only drag you down, and in their place take the justice of God. Give up your inclination to think too much of human beings, and to set too high a value upon their good will, for this tendency is a snare that robs you of peace of mind; take in its place the peace of the Kingdom of Heaven. Give up your pride and vanity, which can never make you happy, but will only rob you of all gladness. Open your heart to joy in the Holy Spirit, and should God demand still greater sacrifices of you, remember that it is but the lower part of your nature that feels the pain of loss. Let this part suffer and die, for the life of the spirit gathers strength from the mortification of the flesh.

LAST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

LIGHT IN DARKNESS

"He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to Him." —Luke xx, 38.

Life in this world resembles a sea-voyage; we are going towards an unknown coast, of which we see very little until we are actually entering the harbor, for the mist obscures it from our sight. Yet we long to know something of the land which we are approaching, as it is to be our home, and many of our loved ones already dwell there. How are they faring? How shall we fare, when our journey is over? These questions haunt us, but we cannot answer them; the mist shrouds everything, and only now and then does a ray of light pierce through the gloom. One such ray proceeds from to-day's Gospel, but, before we examine it, let me first point out that in many respects people of the present day are just like those who lived 1900 years ago, and a sharp remark or a bitter jest is enough to make weak characters waver in their faith, or deny it altogether. Ridicule always has great influence among those who delight in laughing at others, though they are themselves absurd. The Sadducees believed neither in the resurrection, nor in any existence after death, and they tried to cast ridicule upon people who adhered to the old belief. Hence they invented the story of the woman with seven husbands, not perceiving that their joke rested upon a totally false hypothesis, which deprived their argument of all force —a thing that often happens under similar circumstances. We ought not to try to win the jesters over to our side, nor need we

trouble too much about them; all the ridicule in the world will not overthrow the Catholic Church, nor prove our hopes to be vain, and doomed to disappointment.

It is quite certain that there is a life after death. Christ made this perfectly clear by speaking of God as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. These three patriarchs had long been dead, but still they must be alive, "for He is not the God of the dead, but of the living." There are many allusions in Holy Scripture to life beyond the grave, and no Christian, who believes the word of God, can fail to be convinced by them. If I were speaking to an assembly of freethinkers, I should say: "Is it conceivable that God would totally annihilate a creature to whom He has once given life? Such an idea is incompatible with His infinite Perfection." A freethinker might answer: "Perhaps so, but I do not believe in God, or in any invisible world; I trust only to the evidence of my own senses." "Very well, but is it in harmony with our experience of the visible world that anything, which once existed, should be completely annihilated?" Science tells us that it is not; the form, composition and attributes of things may change, but nothing ever ceases absolutely to exist. How then can you maintain that the soul is destroyed? You profess to believe only in this world—where in the world will you discover any evidence in support of your theory? All experience tends, on the contrary, to prove that the soul continues to exist. There is a strong instinctive belief in immortality, planted deep in the heart of every human being. If death robs you of wife, child or friend, can you possibly think that they have not simply passed out of sight, but are cast back into nothingness and exist no more? If you honestly assure me that such is your belief, I can only say that it is an inhuman idea, and that if you thought like other human beings, you would answer my question in the nega-

tive." There is a life after death; Holy Scripture bears witness to it; our own reason and instincts proclaim it.

That life is often called the other life, because in many respects it differs from our present existence. In it there is no sorrow, no poverty and no death; but over and above these points of difference there is another, revealed to us in to-day's Gospel: "They that shall be accounted worthy of that world and of the resurrection from the dead, shall neither be married nor take wives . . . for they are equal to the angels." "Equal to the angels!" This does not mean that we shall be angels, for no creature can turn into something essentially different from what it was before; nor does it mean that we shall be equal to them in every respect, but only on the one point, that there will be no further propagation of the race through marriage. When once the number of mankind is complete, no more will be created, and the number of human beings, like that of angels, will remain constant. This alone will make the mutual relations of the saints in heaven utterly unlike those that we know in our present life.

In many ways, then, life after death will be *another* life, and yet we may truthfully call it still the same, for the Gospel shows that every one of us will remain forever the same person, retaining his own individuality. Abraham continues to be Abraham, and Isaac to be Isaac. Moses and Elias on the Mount of the Transfiguration were the same men who had departed from this earth. In the Apocalypse we read of a great multitude, of all nations, and tribes, and peoples, and tongues (Apoc. vii, 9), and this shows that diversities in language and nationality will still exist in the life to come. How could St. John otherwise have known that he was looking at men of various races and tribes? His statement justifies our concluding with certainty that we shall recognize one another in heaven.

Does not our Lord Himself tell us that the friends made here below will receive us into everlasting dwellings? (Luke xvi, 9). This is indeed a welcome ray of light, flashing out from the land that we are approaching. When we reach the harbor, our loved ones will come to meet us, and will take us by the hand and lead us to our Father's house, where it is good for us to be.

Another question that often presents itself is this: Do our friends who have gone hence know what we are doing here below? With regard to the relations between life here and life hereafter, much is inevitably concealed from us and it is impossible to speak with absolute certainty, but we are fain to believe that God, in His omnipotence and love, allows them to see us. Their sympathy for us would thus gain in intensity and their intercession in fervor.

We are sometimes told that a knowledge of our troubles would impair their happiness. God's compassion is far greater and His insight into our misery is much more profound, and yet His infinite happiness is not thereby diminished; so He is surely able to preserve His friends in glory from suffering at the sight of our misery.

What does Holy Scripture tell us of the knowledge, possessed by the departed, of our life and actions? We read of St. John the Baptist that he was to turn the hearts of the fathers unto the children . . . to prepare unto the Lord a perfect people (Luke i, 17). The fathers had passed away, but their hearts were to be turned to their children who did penance and forsook their evil ways. This seems a clear indication that our forefathers are aware of the transgressions of their descendants and rejoice at their conversion. In the Apocalypse (vi, 9, 10), the souls of the martyrs under the altar cried: "How long, O Lord, dost Thou not judge and revenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" They must therefore know something of what is going on here, and of the events occurring

in the Church; but we cannot tell *how* they receive the information, nor how much they see. It is not unreasonable to suppose that they behold, reflected in the Godhead, things that are of especial interest to themselves. There is, finally, a very remarkable passage in the epistle to the Hebrews (xii, 1), where the Apostle speaks of the great men of old as "a cloud of witnesses." Many learned commentators understand these words to mean that the saints in glory are witnesses of our struggles; we certainly may take them in this sense, if we choose.

All these thoughts, derived from Holy Scripture, do not indeed amount to a brilliant light cast on the joys awaiting us at our homecoming, but we may at least call them a ray of light, piercing the darkness around us.

Let us think often of the Communion of Saints; it is a most consoling article in our creed: We are all one, and the union of all saints, both in this world and the next, may be far closer than we suppose.

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

FULFILMENT OF PROPHECIES

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, wherefore He hath anointed me, to preach the Gospel to the poor, He hath sent me, to heal the contrite of heart, to preach deliverance to the captives and sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of reward."—Luke iv, 18, 19.

These words refer to the Jewish year of jubilee, the "acceptable year of the Lord," which occurred at intervals of fifty years. At that time prisoners were released, debts remitted, and hereditary estates, that had been sold, returned to their original owners. In Christ, however, all this was accomplished in a higher manner, and ever since His birth there has been a perpetual jubilee on earth, as He Himself said: "This day is fulfilled this scripture." Every new year is for the Church a new year of jubilee. Let us begin this year by considering how the scripture is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and how He established a jubilee on our earth. We must not forget that He alone had power to do this, for the world, if left to itself, is nothing but a vale of tears, and never permanently an abode of happiness.

I. *Sight to the blind.*—Many blind men recovered their sight through Jesus Christ, but is not the world that rejects Him still more blind than they were? Is not spiritual blindness a still greater affliction than mere loss of eyesight? It is difficult to understand why people do not realize their blindness, and require to have proof of it given to them. The proof is simple enough: If they were not spiritually blind, they would grasp the all-important truths upon which their salvation depends. Every one will agree in calling a man spiritually blind who has no perception for his own happiness.

The world that denies Christ fails to appreciate what it loses. If you ask men why they repudiate Christianity, you will receive obscure and, in many cases, contradictory answers. One person believes that there is a God, another does not; one thinks that there is another life, another denies it; one is of opinion that we have souls, another that we have only bodies; one fancies that the wicked will be punished after death, another that all alike will be saved, because God is merciful. One says that man is higher than all the rest of creation, because he possesses free will; another maintains that there is no such thing as freedom, but that all is determined beforehand and bound by the iron law of necessity. If this latter theory were true, we might as well all shoot ourselves, arguing that if death ensues, it is only because all was pre-ordained, and beyond our control. Some believe that we shall have to render an account for our actions, whilst others, who deny our possession of free will, consider that we can not be held responsible for what we do. Does not the very existence of such conflicting opinions betray spiritual blindness?

Sometimes we are told that the world is advancing in its spiritual perception, but this is by no means invariably true. Instead of going forward, it often goes backward, and plunges again into errors that seemed to have been abolished centuries ago. For instance, there is a revival of fatalism, *i. e.,* the theory that man is inexorably the bondslave of a hard, gloomy, cold and cruel fate. This doctrine was a dark spot in the lives of the Greeks, and now it is again extremely fashionable to believe in mysterious forces that absolutely control our existence. Buddhism is perhaps the saddest and most hopeless of all theories of life. According to it, all existence is sheer misery, and to exist is to be wretched; he only is happy who has ceased to exist, whose life has gone out like a

candle. This is Nirvana, bliss, the great nothingness, and our final aim must be to seek annihilation and absorption in this Nirvana. Who could suppose that a revival of Buddhism was possible in modern Europe? Yet there are in our midst societies formed for the worship of Buddha, the all-happy, whose happiness consists in non-existence. These people rave about the joys of Nirvana, but surely, before they can do this they must have taken a fatal step backwards into the errors of the past.

The world is spiritually blind, as long as it refuses to come to Christ and be cured, but those who believe in and hear Him, possess the gift of sight. We may well thank God that our path is not in darkness; we know whence we come and whither we go, and our goal shines brightly before us. Even the realm of death is not altogether obscure, and we walk not in darkness, but in the light. Praised be Jesus Christ, who giveth sight unto the blind!

II. *To heal the contrite of heart.*—There are many suffering hearts in this world, many disappointments, many sorrows, many ruined lives. We often encounter them, and see the mark of sin on the brows of our fellow creatures, in the depths of whose souls is nothing but death and despair.

The world asserts its ability to remedy all these evils, but this claim is undoubtedly false, and even among its adherents there are some who hold another opinion, and, regarding themselves as peculiarly enlightened, say: "The world, existence and life as a whole are nothing but misery from beginning to end. Ultimately the door will open and allow the soul to look down into the deep darkness which we must enter, crossing the gloomy river in Charon's boat.

Is this abode beyond the stream Paradise? or is it the place of weeping and gnashing of teeth? No one seems to know, and up-to-date people make a point of stifling every question asked by the

anxious soul. Despair meets us on every side, in pictures, in dissertations, in novels and on the stage; it makes the nerves quiver with dread of the unknown, and, far from healing sorrowful hearts, it poisons them, undermining all energy and paralyzing all activity.

It is no mere assertion, incapable of proof, but a statement of fact to say that the world can not heal hearts that are bruised. There is, however, one kind of sorrow that may lead to good, and this is real contrition for sin. "I have thrown away my happiness, and frittered away my life. Once in its springtime I looked out on days full of promise, and bathed in sunlight; but now the autumn has come, with clouds, darkness and storms, and the withered leaves are blown by the wind, and there is no fruit on the trees that were so rich in blossom. I have destroyed my own happiness and that of my wife; I have led my own children into evil, and now with horror I see them walking on the same paths which have brought me to ruin. I am to blame for it all—my fault, my fault, my most grievous fault."

Has the world any remedy for this sorrow? Can it remove this "most grievous fault?" No, it does not even pretend to do so; none can remove sin but Christ, who came into the world to take upon Himself our transgressions. In Him alone is healing to be found for the stricken heart. It is because He possesses this power that His Gospel has penetrated all over the world, and the Gospel of Jesus Christ, as Agnus Dei, the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world, is the only means of raising to health those who acknowledge their sin.

Who has a right to contradict us if we say that we find healing for our hearts in the Gospel of Christ? From it we derive strength, joy, happiness and hope; and just as it is a fact that the world can

not cure our sorrows, so is it a fact that Christ can and does heal them. Praised be Jesus Christ, who healeth the contrite of heart.

III. *Deliverance to the captives.*—It is a great and glorious thing to obtain forgiveness of sins, but it is not enough. There is something mean and unworthy, we are told, in forgiveness unaccompanied by an effort to escape from the bondage of sin, and many people suppose that we Catholics are quite satisfied if our sins are forgiven. It is undeniably mean and unworthy of a son, who, after injuring his father, thinks only of being pardoned, and not of abandoning his career of vice. Even if it were possible—but it is not—for one who is not determined to forsake evil, to obtain forgiveness of his sins, it is certain that he would never be at peace, as long as he was in bondage to evil. We need deliverance from the power of sin in our members, and as captives long for freedom.

Can the world about us set us free? Can it supply or suggest any means of overcoming our evil desires and passions, and of thus becoming good? What a fatal mistake is made by those who try to dispense with Jesus Christ! The world can never effect our rescue; it tries only to stifle our anxious plea for release from the chains of sin by saying: "There is no liberty anywhere; there is nothing but laws, necessity, impulses and blind fate." Or if ever the modern world speaks of something called liberty, we discover with horror that it is only another name for unbridled license, which drags men down into the slavery of sin, and which in ancient times found expression in the words: "Steep thy soul in delights, and then die."

Let me here again declare that I am speaking of facts, not making mere arbitrary assertions. It is a fact that the world can not give us deliverance from the bondage of sin. Can Christ release us from it? To one who knows Him, such a question is superfluous. His

friends know by experience that He can do so, and continues to do so throughout their lives. None can deny that He effects this by sanctifying their wills through His Word and by His holy Sacraments, which purify our human nature and give us strength to overcome our passions. He acts through His holy Church, which is the home of His Saints, who serve Him in freedom of spirit. Praised be Jesus Christ, who giveth deliverance to the captives!

We know, therefore, what we have to expect from the world and from Jesus Christ respectively during the coming year. Our knowledge is derived not from theories and hypotheses of our own fabrication, but from a study of facts, which can not be questioned as they are plain to view.

Which shall we follow—the world or Christ? May God give us grace to say resolutely: "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

MEN WHO WAIT FOR THEIR LORD

"And you yourselves be like to men who wait for their Lord, when He shall return from the wedding; that when He cometh and knocketh, they may open to Him immediately."—Luke xii,, 36.

In the Apocalypse (vi, 10) St. John the Evangelist records having heard a loud and eager cry proceeding from souls who asked why God had not yet overthrown His enemies on earth. Hence it appears that the departed know at least something of what goes on in this world, and follow the course of events with interest. We cannot tell how much they know, nor how they acquire their knowledge. St. John says that they longed for the final triumph of God's kingdom, "and it was said to them that they should rest for a little time, till their fellow servants and their brethren . . . should be filled up." If the souls of martyrs have to wait, and if their existence is a time of yearning expectation, surely it is only natural that the earthly life of Christ's friends should also be described as a period of waiting. In to-day's gospel our Lord speaks of it as such, and sums up the lesson that He teaches in the words: "Be you yourselves like to men who wait for their lord."

This sense of expectation characterizes the life of Christians in this world, and is of itself very important, whilst at the same time it distinguishes them from worldlings.

I. The children of this world do not expect their Lord, for, being dominated by the spirit of worldliness, they look only to the present, and not to the future; they think only of earth, and not of heaven; and they care only for the world, and not for God. Like the rich man in the parable, the worldling desires to enjoy all good things

in this present life, and it is the fashion to ridicule any who have supernatural aims, and to regard those only as sensible who set all their interest upon the certainty of the present. We are told that it is foolish to think about what is future and therefore uncertain, and vast numbers of people nowadays acquiesce in these views, and they do not hesitate to renounce the Church and Christianity, and to cast aside the faith of their childhood.

But supposing the world and the things around us are deceptive? What does this life offer us besides poverty, sickness, disgrace, hunger and cold? Is it a consolation to be deprived of all hope regarding the future? Let those who have lost their faith have recourse to their teachers who have robbed them of all comfort and hope and ask: "What consolation can you give us in place of the hope that you have taken away?"

They seek a comforter, but will find none, unless they join the ranks of those who wait for their Lord. Woe to the reckless teachers, who rob the multitude of the hope that would console them in suffering, and teach them to care only for the present! Such men have much to answer for, especially in the case of those who abandon themselves to despair, when the present fails to satisfy them, for the sorrows of this life must inevitably be unbearable where there is no hope for the future.

This worldly spirit knows no other happiness than the enjoyment of earthly pleasures; it gives rise to much ill feeling and uneasiness, and embitters society.

Can men, who possess all that the present can offer, dispense with hope regarding the future life beyond the grave? They have given up all expectation of heaven; but can earth with its pleasures and amusements satisfy them? If we question them, some will boldly answer "Yes," whilst others will reply in an evasive manner; but

if we go to Holy Scripture, we find the blunt statement that there is no peace for the wicked. For the most part they are aware that something essential is lacking. A young girl, brought up in the modern indifference to all religion, comes home from a ball, where she has enjoyed herself vastly. In a ballroom are to be found most of the things calculated to delight a young devotee of fashion, and she has not been slow to avail herself of them. But on her return she throws herself on her bed, and weeps bitterly. Why? What has happened? Probably she does not know the reason for her tears, but is aware only of being unspeakably disappointed. All is over, like a will o' the wisp that glowed for a time and then vanished, leaving nothing behind. Many of the gayest people in the world experience similar states of depression; they cannot rid themselves of the feeling that they lack something indispensable to their happiness, for they look forward to nothing.

II. Christians, on the contrary, look forward to what is of the utmost importance: they wait for their Lord, and, when He comes, they will have true happiness and realise the final aim of their existence. This anticipation is their chief source of courage amidst the sufferings of this life; they do not expect happiness now, nor do they make large demands upon the present, since it is only in the future that their hopes will be fulfilled. They do not think it strange that they suffer in this life, for our Lord warned them that they should have distress in this world (John xvi, 33), and He did not pledge Himself to give them happiness in the worldly sense. They do not despair when the cross is laid upon them, for their Saviour said: "Whosoever doth not carry his cross and come after Me, cannot be My disciple" (Luke xiv, 27). They do not complain of having to wait, for their Lord has bidden them do so, and they are looking forward to the greatest possible happiness.

But I must beware of saying too much, as they do sometimes complain bitterly, for their road is so rough and steep, their time of waiting is so long and tedious that they cry: "How long, O Lord, how long?" Yes, with shame be it confessed that, though we are Christians, we complain, as if we had no Lord and Saviour to expect. The more we forget Him, the louder are our complaints, and, if we cease to expect Him, we certainly have no right to the consolation and joy that such expectation affords. If we succeed in convincing ourselves thoroughly that our life here is only a time of waiting, we shall not look for any particular happiness in this world, nor shall we be disturbed if earthly joys fail.

One of our chief weaknesses is to demand earthly happiness, and it behooves us to uproot this craving at all costs. We may not be able to say with St. Teresa *Aut pati, Domine, aut mori,* "Let me either suffer, O Lord, or die!" nor to reply, like St. John of the Cross, who, when asked what reward he desired for all his labors, said: *Domine, pati et contemni pro te,* "Lord, to suffer and be despised for Thy sake;" yet we can at least familiarize ourselves with the idea that suffering is necessary for us, and brings many blessings, and then we shall look forward to the future with fresh joy. Like St. Paul, the saints have always gloried in and because of their tribulations, since their trials gave rise to hope, which was not confounded (Rom. v, 3-5).

III. Those who wait for their Lord are His servants, expecting Him to come, not only as their Redeemer, but also as their Judge, to whom they will have to render an account of their services. This thought makes them faithful to their duties, and so human society as a whole is benefited. Would that those who have renounced Christianity could realise how much society owes to it and to the Church! Public morality depends upon men's recognition of the

fact that this morality, and all the duties that it involves, originate in God; He is our supreme Lord; to Him all are morally responsible, and to Him all must look for judgment. The moral decay of our own age is due to the cleavage between ethics and religion. Men deny that all morality has its origin in God; they deny our responsibility to Him, and deny that He will judge us. As a result, His servants grow reckless and neglect their duty, and the very foundations of society are shaken, and we are threatened with all the horrors of a revolution, arising from the same cause as previous social upheavals, viz., that men have ceased to expect God to be their Judge.

What has the world in prospect? Its frivolity will be ended when men are called to judgment. There were thousands of eager spectators in the theatres at Vienna and Chicago, when the terrible cry of "Fire" was raised, and they were hurried before God's tribunal, all without expectation of their Lord's coming.

Happy are those servants who remain at their post and do their duty; they will not lose their reward, for their Lord will make them sit down in His Kingdom, and will minister to them (Luke xii, 37).

Let us act as men who wait, watch and serve, and then we too shall enter into the joy of our Lord (Matth. xxv, 21).

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS

"Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways plain, and all flesh shall see the Salvation of God."—Luke iii, 5, 6.

St. John's words rang out like a voice in the wilderness. He knew that very few accepted his message and were really converted. The great majority either refused to listen to his exhortation, or, like Herod, they only took a temporary pleasure in the great preacher's utterances, and the impression produced upon them was superficial and short-lived.

When we hear the summons to do penance, how are we affected by it? Is it for us too merely the voice of one crying in the wilderness?

I. Thousands of people are altogether unwilling to hear of penance; it is vain to call upon them to repent, for they think nothing about God, or their souls, or their own salvation, and never set foot in the house of God, but spend their time in other ways. This may be the result of carelessness, and certainly many are not consciously devoid of faith, only they say that they must attend to other matters, and have no time for religion. Some spend Sunday in work and in making up their accounts, others devote the day to amusement. You may see them all setting out just as the church bells are summoning everybody to the house of God. Summer and winter have each their own occupations, and both young and old devote every Sunday in the year to some form or other of sport, until at last their ears are deaf to the cry: "Do penance, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Very frequently all this should

be ascribed to frivolity and carelessness, rather than to conscious neglect of God's commands.

Let no one misunderstand me. I have no objection to sport, or to wholesome outdoor exercise; in fact, I feel inclined to encourage everybody, young and old alike, to take part in it, for it is good both for mind and body. Only let everything be done in moderation. It is quite possible to derive pleasure and advantage from games without falling into sin, but it is wrong to make playing games an excuse for absence from church and neglect of one's religious duties. Overindulgence in games tends to alienate the young altogether from the practise of their religion, and to make them forget that they have souls to save; and herein lies a great danger for the Church, the nation and our country, for the future of each depends upon the rising generation. I wish to impress upon all parents and teachers the fact that it is their duty to remind young people of their obligation to attend church on Sunday. Do not weaken your admonitions by pleading that it is unwise to coerce the young against their will. Such arguments are not only misleading, but are actually sinful, since we ought to obey the voice of duty, whether we like it or not.

From the unconscious unbelief due to frivolity the transition to conscious unbelief is very easy. This latter kind of unbelief is one of the most terrible evils of the age in which we live, and it is the chief reason why the call to penance meets with so little response. A systematic effort to uproot Christianity from the hearts of the people is being made in every class of society. In our schools very little attention is paid to religious instruction, and our enemies desire to banish it altogether; it is regarded as a matter of complete indifference whether a couple is married at the registrar's office or in church, where they are united in the name of God and receive

His blessing. Baptism is frequently neglected, and parents consider themselves at liberty to decide whether a child is to be brought up in God's service, or in that of the world.

We must not shut our eyes to facts around us; and it is undeniable that the number of those who no longer believe in heaven above or in hell beneath is steadily growing. Paganism is increasing in our midst, and very little good is effected by the so-called "emancipated" spirits who call upon the slaves of matter to look upwards to the stars and mountain tops, and to listen to the "great silence." All that they say is meaningless, and now, as in the time of St. John, the masses turn a deaf ear to every summons to do penance.

II. There were, however, some who listened to St. John, but paid only superficial attention to his words, and so were not really converted. Such people exist at the present day—what is wrong with them?

The word *conversion* means turning the mind; and the chief mistake made by these careless hearers of the word is that they do not take things seriously, and stop short at what is on the outside, instead of penetrating into the depths of their own hearts. The first essential to conversion is contrition. We are all ready enough to call ourselves miserable sinners, in a general way. This can be done without any real change of disposition, and without abandoning our pride, worldliness and self-indulgence. But it is not so easy to discuss actual sins in detail, and to acknowledge one besetting sin with shame and sorrow costs us far more and does us far more good than to lament over our sinful lives without discovering and confessing our real sins.

In speaking of contrition, people are apt to lay too much stress upon their feelings, and too little upon their will. It may of course be beneficial to feel the sting and burden of sin, but this is not

enough, nor is it essential. Feelings are untrustworthy and liable to change, and real, practical conversion depends not upon them, but upon the will. We must resolve to get rid of the actual sins that we have committed, and be ready to bear their temporal punishment, if God will only remit their guilt. When we rely exclusively upon our feelings, we are too apt to think only of God's mercy and to forget His justice. God is just, as well as merciful, and therefore we must suffer for our sins, and whoever is unwilling to do so, possesses only superficial sorrow for them. Moreover, if we are really contrite, we must intend to make reparation as far as we can, for what we have done amiss. The story of Zacheus supplies us with an excellent example of true conversion. No one is really turned or converted from his evil ways, who refuses to repair the evil that he has done in the sight of God and man. Conversion without faith is impossible, and men's faith is often dead, incapable of bearing fruit and of revealing itself in newness of life and active charity. Without life and charity faith is dead.

To sum up: The call to conversion has often rung out like the voice of one crying in the wilderness. If with honest purpose you resolve to listen to that call, the desert, i. e., the dreary wilderness of life, will blossom like a garden of roses.

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

JOHN THE BAPTIST

"John answered and said: A man cannot receive anything, unless it be given him from heaven. You yourselves do bear me witness that I said: I am not Christ, but I am sent before Him."—John iii, 27, 28.

In the gospel we have the picture of St. John presented to us before that of Christ. John's work was to preach and prepare the way for our Saviour. Let us to-day consider his personality, his greatness and his weakness. Very few people are so splendidly equipped with natural gifts, and he possessed in addition wonderful gifts of grace. He surpassed all his contemporaries in clearness of intellect, as was seen at his first meeting with Christ. Before our Lord had said a word publicly on the subject of His person and mission, John recognized both, and gave expression to his prophetic insight in the words: *Ecce Agnus Dei, ecce qui tollit peccatum mundi,* Behold the Lamb of God, behold Him that taketh away the sin of the world. He summed up thus all that Christ was, and all that He was to do. No one else in that age realised these facts so fully.

John was endowed with the gift of eloquence, that carried his hearers away even when he preached on the need of penance. Everyone went to hear him, men, women, scholars, soldiers and Pharisees. Even Herod heard him gladly, and from time to time his actual enemies seem to have delighted in his eloquence, although they did not open their hearts to his message. His fame spread over the whole country, and attracted universal attention, so that the Council, known as the Sanhedrim, sent a deputation to ask what

account he gave of himself, for some supposed him to be the Christ, others Elias.

We possess more trustworthy testimony to St. John's greatness than that of Herod, the people or the council, for we know what Christ said of him. He spoke of him as a prophet, comparing him with Elias, one of the mightiest figures in the Old Testament, and then added "and more than a prophet," declaring that no one greater than John had ever been born of woman. Surely no plainer evidence of his greatness can be required!

But in extolling St. John, we may be certain that our Lord was thinking more of his goodness and virtue than of his intellectual faculties. A man's intellect may indeed be worthy of our admiration, but his qualities of heart deserve more respect; and good brains may accompany an evil disposition, in which case a clever man is worthless. Moral qualities rank far above intellectual, and in the balance of God's justice a heroic will far outweighs learning. This is perhaps hard to understand and the world thinks more of intellect than of goodness of heart. Such is the way of the world, but in St. John both these qualities were combined. If his will had not been great and noble, he could have made no good use of his brilliant intellectual gifts, and would certainly have employed them in worldly pursuits. He might have procured a pleasant existence by means of his genius and reputation—nothing would have been easier. He might have secured a position where he could live in comfort and with a large income at his disposal, but instead of acting thus, he went out into the desert, and it is there that we hear of him, not in fashionable society. He wore no soft raiment, but a garment of camel's hair, girt with a leathern strap. His fare was the simplest that he could obtain—locusts and wild honey.

St. John might have used his talents so as to win fame and honor,

and rise to some exalted position. He had only to ask himself: "What do the princes and people wish to hear? What will please them? How can I gratify them?" He possessed sufficient ability to become universally popular, and so to advance to the most influential offices in the state. He might have become a brilliant politician, a conspicuous member of society. But what would worldly people say of St. John as he really was? Would they not call him a fool for acting as he did? Instead of considering what princes and people wished him to tell them, he asked himself what they required to be told. Instead of thinking what public opinion and the spirit of the age pronounced to be the truth, he asked boldly: What is truth? He bore witness to the truth, and proclaimed it fearlessly, though it was often unpleasant to hear, and was in direct opposition to public opinion and the spirit of the age, and the views of princes and people. St. John was shrewd enough to foresee what his reward would be, and faced it with equanimity. Instead of gaining honors in this world, he was cast into prison, and instead of winning favor with the king, he paid for his audacity with his life. His martyrdom was the culmination of his greatness. That is a crown which the proud feel no desire to possess, though the humble long to gain it, and St. John was humble and of little importance in his own sight. To-day's gospel tells us more of his humility than of his greatness. His disciples tried to make him jealous of Jesus by saying that all men were coming to our Lord. People were beginning to forsake St. John and turn their backs upon him; he was losing his popularity, and his followers were running after some one else. John answered quietly and emphatically that he was not the bridegroom, but only the bridegroom's friend. The bride is the Church, which was destined to be founded by Jesus Christ and not by John. It was quite right that men

should follow our Lord, since thus the bride came to the Bridegroom. These were the thoughts in St. John's mind, and he expressed them simply and humbly. His own light must fade away, but Christ's must rise and shine, and so he said: "He must increase, but I must decrease." All is perfectly in order. I am not worthy to loose the latchet of His shoe. His success, far from annoying me, makes me unspeakably happy, for I am the friend who rejoices in silence at the Bridegroom's triumph.

This brings us back to the consideration of St. John's greatness, for he was great in God's sight precisely because he was little in his own. His highest glory before God is his humility; he refused to be great in his own eyes. All true greatness is humble, although the world fails to comprehend that man makes himself small by striving to be great. It behoves us to understand this fact thoroughly, if we are to have a happy Christmas. We must humble ourselves like St. John, if we desire to share his happiness. We must be converted and become like little children, if we are to rejoice in the Babe of Bethlehem; otherwise we shall not enter the kingdom of heaven. Like St. John we must recognize our real littleness, and then we shall be able to follow his example and bear with tranquil and untroubled minds all the humiliations of life, that are so beneficial to us. It was in order to teach us this lesson, that God has deigned to show us in the Gospel how in St. John's humility and littleness lay the source of his real joy and greatness.

CHRISTMAS DAY

AUGUSTUS IN ROME AND CHRIST IN THE CITY OF DAVID

"And it came to pass that in those days there went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus that the whole world should be enrolled. This enrolling was first made by Cyrinus, the governor of Syria. And all went to be enrolled, every one into his own city."—Luke ii, 1-3.

I. At the time of Julius Caesar's murder, Octavianus, his adopted son and heir, was eighteen years of age, and was studying in Greece. He hastened back to Rome, where he founded the Roman Empire, and took the titles of *Caesar* (emperor) and *Augustus* (venerable). He was the most powerful monarch who ever reigned, and for 43 years he governed the Roman Empire, which extended over all the known world. He was literally supreme, for as *Imperator* he had unlimited power over the army; he could make peace and declare war, and raise legions at a word. As *Princeps* he enjoyed absolute control over the legislative and judicial machinery of the state. As *Pontifex Maximus* he was entitled to deal with all questions concerning religion. His dominions extended from the Atlantic Ocean on the West to the Euphrates in the East, and from the Rhine and the Danube in the north to Mount Atlas and the cataracts of the Nile in the south. They were divided into 25 provinces, all admirably organized and connected with one another by means of roads and canals. At the end of his career the emperor was able to say of Rome: "I found it a city of brick, and I am leaving it a city of marble." Science and art flourished during his reign, which

is always considered the golden age of classical literature. Wealthy men in Rome acquired fortunes that exceeded those of our millionaires, and they lived in a refinement of luxury unsurpassed at the present day.

"It came to pass in those days there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that the whole world should be enrolled." The emperor issued orders to "the whole world," and it obeyed. "All went to be enrolled." No one thought of resisting his will. He demanded tribute from the whole world, and it was paid, the tribute money bearing the emperor's head and inscription. If ever there was one absolute monarch supreme over the whole world, it was Augustus.

II. In a remote corner of his vast dominions, in a small, unimportant town of Judea, a town so insignificant that the great emperor had probably never heard of it, the enrolment that he had ordered gave rise, as elsewhere, to some excitement. The inns were full of visitors, and every one was attending to his own business, for all were anxious to have their papers in order, and to register their names and families, so as to be able to return home as soon as possible, and resume their ordinary life. Few noticed a poor workman, who entered the town with his wife in the evening. Wherever he asked for shelter he was told that there was no room, until at last he found an empty stable, and there, during the night, a child was born. There was nothing strange in all this, considering the crowded state of the town. The child born that night was Christ the Lord, born in David's city. His birth was obscure and His whole life was trivial and unimportant in the eyes of the world, whilst His death was that of a criminal, on the shameful wood of the Cross. And yet what do we see? What has become of the empire once governed by Caius Julius Caesar Octavianus Augustus?

It exists no longer, for it decayed and perished more than 1400 years ago.

What shall we say of Christ? His kingdom extends over nations and races of which Augustus, with all his power, never heard. Christ the Lord, born in David's city, reigns over the whole world. For 45 years Augustus wielded a sceptre before which all his subjects cowered in fear, but from century to century Christ exercises an infinitely greater force, since He is loved by all who belong to His Kingdom. For a short time Augustus officiated at an altar, the fire on which was soon extinguished, but Christ is a high priest for ever according to the order of Melchisedech. Augustus erected a marble city, but Christ raised a temple of living stones. When Augustus lay on his deathbed in Campania, he is said to have asked those about him whether he had played his part well; and, when they answered in the affirmative, he said: "Then let me hear your applause, for the drama is over." When Christ died on the Cross on Golgotha, He said: *Consummatum est,* it is finished. The one delighted some few nations by acting a brilliant part that ended at his death. The other accomplished a work which will remain for ever, and be the means of salvation to every race on earth.

The Roman empire was the greatest expression of strength ever attained by the natural forces of man; it was the supreme effort made by human beings to realise their own powers; hence its downfall cannot be compared with that of any single nation or dynasty. It was the breaking up of all natural civilization, and a proof that mankind, left unaided, cannot be self-sufficient. The kingdom of Christ, the Lord born in the city of David, alone is able to stand firm. Earthly kingdoms, with all their power and splendor, rise and fall, but the reign of the Crucified, the Son of Man, lasts on from age to age. Let us therefore feel no fear when the world

rallies its forces and the kingdom of Christ appears small and insignificant. The world is always the same, and is unable now as ever to satisfy the cravings of the human heart. But Christ, too, is always the same, no less powerful and no less merciful now than He was in the past. He will lead His followers to victory, and raise His Church from obscurity to glory.

SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

A SIGN OF CONTRADICTION—A TOKEN OF VICTORY

"And his father and mother were wondering at those things which were spoken concerning him. And Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary his mother: Behold this child is set for the fall and for the resurrection of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be contradicted."—Luke ii, 33, 34.

Some people tell us that truth prevails only when it succumbs. Nothing in the world encounters so much opposition as truth. Falsehood is more to the world's taste, and meets therefore with less antagonism, whilst it more readily finds admirers and adherents; but truth has always aroused hostility, and no one ever aroused such bitter enmity as did He who is Truth itself—our Lord Jesus Christ. In to-day's gospel we have a true account of the antagonism that He was to encounter.

There is in my possession a very beautiful picture, copied from a work of one of the greatest modern painters. It represents our Saviour surrounded by women, and His holy Mother kneeling at the foot of her Son's Cross. From His sacred Body a ray of light falls upon her face, revealing her expression of profound love and sorrow. She was His Mother, and therefore loved Him more intensely than any other human being could do; and for this very reason she also suffered more intensely, and was indeed the Mater dolorosa. Grief pierced her heart like a sword when Christ hung dying in token of the violent hostility provoked against Him, who was the Truth. Well might aged Simeon have called Him "a sign that shall be contradicted!"

Have those who contradicted Him secured a final triumph? The Jews crucified Him, but have they retained the victory? Are they not scattered over the whole world as an unhappy nation, that can call no country its own? Have the pagans gained the day, who

shared in the most horrible crime ever committed, the murder of the Son of God? No, we all know that paganism did not conquer. It arrayed all its forces against our Lord and His few followers, and against the gospel which it treated with scorn and contempt; but ever since that time paganism has been decaying, and it is destined to vanish altogether before the victorious advance of Christianity.

It is true that Christ is still a sign which is contradicted, even among Christian nations, and in the world there are many who profess to be Christians whilst they actually deny God and Christ. The wicked prosper, but it benefits them little that their blossom appears good if their fruit is evil, for the latter is far more important than the former. If agnosticism and the denial of Christianity are ultimately to triumph, their fruit must be good, and their opposition to Christ must have power to render men happy in life and in death—otherwise it would not really prevail. At the same time, and for the same reason, it must be able to make men better; but can anyone honestly and conscientiously assert that agnosticism makes its adherents better men and women than Christians are? No! Of course I do not mean to say that every agnostic is a wicked or vicious person; he may not only have a good side, but possess great qualities, and be a most respectable member of society. We are not called upon to judge individuals, for that is not our affair but God's, who alone can penetrate the heart and read the inner thoughts and intentions of man. The question with which we are concerned is: "Can agnosticism make men better? Are agnostics as a rule better than other people?" Certainly agnosticism as such is incapable of rendering us better. There are several kinds of agnostics, but we may say of them all that they either deny the existence of God, or say that, if there is a God, He cannot be in

communication with us, nor speak with us, nor give us any definite commandments and precepts. Most agnostics hold that they are bound to lead moral lives, but must impose upon themselves the commandments of morality, since no Divine authority capable of imposing them can be proved to exist. Therefore, in their opinion, we have in ourselves all moral authority, and there is no absolute supreme Judge, to whom we shall have to give an account; every one is responsible only to his own conscience. Hence many modern agnostics deny all responsibility for evil, and regard it as a disease which we cannot avoid. Can such a doctrine have any moral weight? Is it likely to make men better? It denies the existence of our supreme Lawgiver and Judge, and destroys all sense of responsibility either to God or to ourselves. We need not hesitate to say that agnosticism can never improve us.

But, we may be told that the experience of life sometimes proves men to have become better in consequence of adopting agnosticism. We are not concerned with individuals, but may ask in general terms: Are Christians inferior to the crowds who never enter a church, and who devote Sunday either to work or to worldly amusements? They live for earthly riches, earthly joys and earthly honors; they fancy that they can think, speak and act as they will, without incurring any responsibility to almighty God, and without any prospect of a judgment to decide their lot in the future life. We need not condemn individuals, but every Christian is aware that, in order to be truly good, a man must know that there is a God, to whom he must one day give account for his actions, and who will eventually be his Judge.

If agnosticism, the denial of Christianity, is to prevail in the end, it must have power to make men happy, happier than they were when they believed in Christ. Is this possible? If happiness con-

sisted in money, honors, luxury, art and science, we might be told that agnosticism could rival Christianity in teaching men how to acquire it. But all these things are powerless to give happiness unless they are accompanied by peace of heart. What does it profit a man to possess the whole world, and suffer the loss of his soul? True happiness consists in peace of heart, and agnosticism cannot give us this in life, still less in death. It cannot enable us to face death with the peaceful anticipation and joyful hope displayed by the two aged people in to-day's gospel. No peace is possible for one who does not know where to find forgiveness for his sins. Here we have the great defect of agnosticism; it points out no way of peace, because it recognizes no way to forgiveness; it knows nothing of the Saviour of sinners or of the God of mercy.

How, then, can contradiction and opposition triumph over Jesus Christ if it cannot make us better, nor give us real happiness in life and in death? It's victory is purely imaginary, or rather it is the outcome of a great and fatal falsehood.

II. *The token of victory.*—"Thou hast triumphed, O Galilean!" These are said to have been the last words uttered by Julian the Apostate, after the failure of his attempt to revive paganism. They express the involuntary testimony borne by the ancient world to the fact that the sign of contradiction has become the token of victory even in this world.

In proof of this assertion we may refer to the triumph of the Cross in every age; first under the Roman Empire, when, in spite of furious persecutions, the Church arose victorious after apparent defeat. We may refer to the benefits that have invariably followed the preaching of the gospel; Christianity delivered slaves from bondage, and women from their position of inferiority; it dispelled the darkness of sin and ignorance, and spread abroad light, civiliza-

tion and knowledge. It inspired artists to produce their finest works; it gave freedom to the human intellect, and afforded a solid moral foundation for legislation and civil order. In fact, it would be true to say that all that is good, strong, and noble in our present civilized existence, is due to the spirit of Christianity. This is weighty evidence in support of our assertion that the sign of contradiction has become the token of victory. Yet let me rather refer to something quite different, viz., to the two aged persons of whom we read in to-day's gospel. How good they were! Simeon was just and God-fearing, whilst Anna served God day and night. They were good because they were so pious, and therefore they were happy. Anna "confessed to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all that looked for the redemption of Israel"—no doubt she spoke out of the fulness of her heart, and was very happy. And Simeon said: "My eyes have seen Thy salvation." Hence he enjoyed happiness during his earthly life, and spoke of his approaching death in terms very unlike those used by worldlings: "Now Thou dost dismiss Thy servant, O Lord, according to thy word in peace." The prospect of death was to him a source of happiness. But why were they so glad? Because they believed in Him for whom they had longed as the Redemption and glory of Israel—though the world would speak against Him.

Surely this is evidence enough to prove that the sign of contradiction became the token of victory; for Simeon and Anna represent a vast host of men, women and children who have triumphed through their faith in Jesus Christ, overcoming sin, death and satan. Their faith has made them good and happy in this life, and has enabled them to depart hence in peace. Therefore cease to contradict your Saviour, and have faith in Him, if you would be happy in life and in death.

SUNDAY AFTER NEW YEAR'S

CHRIST IS HE WHO SHOULD COME

"Now when John had heard in prison the works of Christ, sending two of his disciples, he said to Him: Art thou He that art to come, or look we for another?"—Matt. xi, 2, 3.

It was St. John the Baptist who called our Lord "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world," and who said of himself: "I am not worthy to loose the latchet of his shoe." "He must increase, but I must decrease." He described his own relation to Christ in words burning with love: "The friend of the bridegroom, who standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth with joy because of the bridegroom's voice. This my joy therefore is fulfilled."

Such words express most lively faith in Christ; and what was our Lord's testimony regarding His faithful and humble forerunner? He said: "Amen I say to you, there hath not risen among them that are born of women a greater than John the Baptist" (Matt. xi, 11).

Can we believe that, in spite of all this, St. John ever really felt doubts about Christ? Those who think it inconceivable assume that he sent his disciples to our Lord for their sake, that they might see and hear Him, not for his own sake, since his faith required no strengthening. Ought we to assume that St. John had really lost his faith in Christ, and sent messengers to Him for his own peace of mind? If this had been so, he surely would not have applied to our Lord for information, but would have asked some one else's opinion. Jesus evidently took pains to prevent St. John from being suspected of a change of view, for He said that he was not a reed shaken by the wind (v. 7).

1. *Miracles.*—We often hear that faith in Christ and Christianity

is opposed to all reason, and so men cannot be required to believe. But, on the other hand, if faith has nothing to do with reason, or rather is opposed to it, what can make us believe? We cannot believe unless we have some motive; we cannot fling ourselves blindly into some unknown abyss. Moreover, why should Christ have tried to support and strengthen St. John's faith by adducing arguments that would appeal to his reason? For this is what He did, when He referred to His miracles.

To the deaf He said: "Ephpheta," and their hearing was restored. To the lepers: "I will, be thou made clean," and their disease disappeared. To the dead: "Arise," and they stood up and came forth from the grave. But there is a still greater miracle, which He wrought when by His own power He raised Himself from the dead and resumed His life. Mary Magdalene, the Apostles and more than five hundred witnesses bore testimony to the fact of His resurrection. Now, who but God has control over life and death? Christ's resurrection differed from the raising of Lazarus and of Jairus's daughter; they were raised, and received afresh the gift of life, but our Lord overcame the might of death and rose, as He Himself said: "I have power to lay down my life, and I have power to take it up again" (John x, 18). Hence He must be the Son of God, for God alone has power over life and death.

In His name miracles have been wrought in every age by His Saints, and there is an abundance of most trustworthy evidence in support of them. They continue even at the present day, but the greatest and most undeniable of all miracles is the existence of Christ's Church. She is a society like no other; she combats the evil desires and passions of mankind, and resists their pride and selfishness, and yet she has spread over the entire world and has everywhere triumphed.

Are we not justified in believing Christ's words when we know that miracles are wrought by Him and by His friends in His name? Is it unreasonable to assume that His Church is the kingdom of God, when in this kingdom, as in no other society on earth all the forces of the world to come are seen to reside? I think that those who consider our faith in Jesus Christ and His Church to be foolish and unreasonable, have never really examined either one or the other.

II. *Prophecies.*—Our Lord referred to the prophecies regarding His person, as well as to His own miracles; and showed that in Himself the prophecies of the Old Testament were fulfilled, since it had been foretold that the Messias should work miracles. ·Historians speak of ancient, mediæval and modern history, but to those who have a clear insight into events, there are only two periods, viz., the time before, and the time since our Lord's life on earth. All that went before was in anticipation of His coming; all that has followed refers to Him, and is inexplicable without Him. All our science, art and civilization dates from the renewal of the world that He effected. But the prophecies looked forward to Him, and His life-history, both in outline and in detail, is recorded in the books of the Old Testament, from the first allusion to Him as the Seed of the woman, to the account of His forerunner. All this was written hundreds of years before His birth—if He is *not* the Son of God, who is He? If it is unreasonable to believe in Him, in whom may we reasonably put our faith?

III. *The Gospel.*—Christ wishes not merely to silence doubters, but to win their hearts, and He does this by causing His gospel to be preached to the poor. Who are the poor? Surely all who are in want of anything. And what is meant by preaching the gospel? It means bringing glad tidings to the sorrowful and sinful, but it

means more than this; for, through the gospel of Christ, the sick are healed, the hungry are fed and the poor are enriched.

A countless host, that no man can number, composed of people of every age and nation, proclaims to us the impossibility of doubting that Christ was He who should come; He came to every one of them, and His coming rendered them happy, whereas before they were miserable sinners. Whither should we turn when we are beset with doubts and difficulties? We should follow St. John's example, and have recourse to our Lord Himself. Where shall we find Him? In His Church, and nowhere else; elsewhere we shall seek Him in vain; but He promised to remain with His Church until the consummation of the world, so we may be sure of finding Him there. You will find Him in the Gospel, that is always being preached to the poor; you will find Him in the forgiveness of sins, that is always being bestowed upon the penitent; you will find Him in the living Bread that came down from Heaven to give life to the world. Come not in the spirit of pride, which thinks that it has a right to judge and criticize Christ's Church; those that come in such a spirit, come in vain. But if you approach as humble children of the Church, full of confidence in her teaching, light will again shine in your souls and peace will reign in your hearts.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

"FEAR NOT"

"Fear not, little flock, for it hath pleased your Father to give you a kingdom."—Luke xii, 32.

"Fear not"—these are beautiful words, particularly reassuring at the beginning of a new year. When we think of the many reasons that we have for fear and of the sorrows and trials of our past life, perhaps, too, of the horrors that we have witnessed, it is only natural that we should dread the future. We cannot see what lies before us; it is all veiled from our gaze, and we ask ourselves whether fresh struggles and conflicts, fresh troubles and alarms are not awaiting us. It is well, in moments such as these, to listen to the words: "Fear not," uttered by Him who was all wisdom, truth and love. Yet are they addressed indiscriminately to everyone? Is no one to fear? Yes, there is a fear, which is the one safe way to true joy; and it is impossible to bid those fear not who have never felt this fear, for thus they would be excluded from the path of true happiness.

Fear is a word very easily misunderstood. Some think it creditable to be called fearless, and from one point of view they are right; but not in every case, for it is by no means good and praiseworthy to live, as many do, without any anxiety as to the salvation of their souls.

Probably no one lives without occasionally feeling alarm at death and at the coming judgment. There are moments when fear lays its icy hand on even the most indifferent, but, as a rule, men live on from day to day, contented with what they see, touch and

taste, until all at once the dread summons comes at the hour when they least expect it, and they are hurried away to give an account of their stewardship and to hear their sentence.

Those who live thus have good cause to fear. They see their friends and acquaintances pass away, into the unknown world, that unexplored region to which they never gave a thought. They are gone, and to the survivors we say: "Look down with fear into the abyss at your feet."

Can we look at the life led by most people in the world, and not acknowledge that there is ground for alarm? It is a life full of deception; not perhaps of downright lies, but it abounds in untruthfulness, hypocrisy, and spiteful calumnies, that appear to be true, whilst really they inflict grievous wounds on many a heart, and bring misery upon many a household. It is a true saying, that lies come home to roost, and one day you will remember with fear and trembling every false statement that you have made. Therefore, learn betimes to fear, that you may be converted from falsehood to truth.

Worldly life is full of dishonesty; not necessarily of actions likely to bring men into prison as criminals, but there is great lack of a genuine sense of honor even among refined and respectable people, and there is also a kind of pharisaical dishonesty, that cherishes hatred in the heart under a smiling exterior, and perpetrates all manner of injustice under a semblance of good will. As certainly as that there is a God of justice in Heaven, the hour will come when you will realize your wickedness. Therefore, whilst there is yet time, learn to fear, and be converted from your malicious ways, that you may be honest in the sight of God and man.

Worldly life is full of pride and vanity. I am not speaking of that foolish vanity which is so obvious that everyone recognizes its

emptiness, but of the pride and vanity that conceal themselves under a mask of humility and piety to such an extent that it is often difficult to distinguish a vain fool from a humble Christian. Some day the plausible mask will be torn off, and the fool will stand revealed in all his folly, a laughing-stock to some, a warning to others and a terror to himself. Would that all proud and vain persons would learn to fear, and be converted to humility, before it is too late, for God showeth mercy only to the humble.

"Fear not"—our Lord speaks thus to the little flock of those who have already trodden the path of fear, and know what it is to feel anxiety regarding their salvation; they are His friends and faithful followers here on earth, and it is to them that at the beginning of each new year He says, "Fear not."

Have such as these no ground at all for fear? Not the fear and trembling with which everyone of us has to work out his own salvation, and from which we can never be free as long as that salvation is still a matter of hope, *i. e.*, during our whole existence in this world. Is there no other cause for fear? for instance, fear of what men may do to them? Many of the little flock have suffered grievously in the past, and have been injured and deceived by others; must they not look forward with fear to the future? Sometimes, like Ezechiel, they have fancied themselves to be among friends, and afterwards have discovered that they were in the midst of scorpions. They have often had difficulty in refraining from bitter words of reproach and complaint, and still greater difficulty in controlling thoughts of indignation and contempt. A famous author states the result of his study of mankind thus: "The passion of my soul is contempt." Knowledge of human nature is only too apt to lead to despising it, and here is a reason for fear. Does not the new year suggest possible dangers of this kind?

"Fear not," says our Lord, "who will accuse God's elect? It is God who justifieth." Bear in silence whatever humiliations men may heap upon you, and they will turn into ornaments for your soul.

Or are you not compelled to feel fear about your means of livelihood? Many are threatened with poverty and hunger, or have a very scanty income; yet our Lord says: "Sell what thou hast and give to the poor." Are they to keep nothing? Does He require them to give away the little that they possess? Is He, the all-merciful, mocking His creatures? No, He is not mocking them, nor does He lay upon them any command or obligation. Some children of the Church in every age have followed His counsel, and such find help in this world and salvation in Heaven, for they become Saints. Under all circumstances, however, our Lord says to everyone, as He said once to St. Paul, "Fear not."

If we trust Him, as did the Apostle, we shall be helped, and the needy on earth will be the wealthy in Heaven, for all things work together for good to those who love God. Many things may cause our timid hearts to shrink with fear, but our heavenly Father, who guarded His divine Son in every danger, has assured us that He will protect all His children in every trial and peril; therefore "Fear not, little flock, for it hath pleased your Father to give you a kingdom."

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

CHRISTIAN AND PAGAN VIEWS OF MARRIAGE

"And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. And Jesus also was invited, and His disciples, to the marriage."—John ii, 1, 2.

Matrimony, more perhaps than any other ordinary state of life, offers abundant opportunities to faith of developing and of bringing forth fruit, and it is most important that this should be accomplished, for where marriage is respected, society prospers; and where marriage is dishonored, all social prosperity is undermined, for marriage is the foundation of social life. In the Gospel we read that our Lord was present at a wedding, and He intended thus to sanctify the marriage bond. Nevertheless there are unsanctified marriages even among Christians, and we sometimes meet with pagan ideas on the subject.

It behooves us clearly to distinguish between these pagan views and those which Christians ought to hold, and therefore we will proceed to compare them.

Paganism regards woman as a slave, and this is the result of failure to appreciate every human being as a distinct, living personality. When personality is overlooked, a slave ceases to be an intelligent being, and becomes merely a thing, or at best a domestic animal. Where woman is regarded as the slave of her husband, polygamy results, for he may have several slaves and consequently several wives. The number of his wives and slaves is as unimportant as the number of his domestic animals and of the utensils employed in his business. A further result of this theory is that

marriage ceases to be permanent. A worn-out utensil is thrown away, a worthless slave is got rid of in one way or another, and so is an animal which is no longer required. If the wife is nothing but a chattel belonging to the husband, he can keep her or dispose of her as he chooses.

Some one may feel inclined to exclaim that all this has nothing to do with us; no wife is now her husband's slave. Of course she is not *legally,* but is she not sometimes *practically* a slave? Do no men allow their wives to toil in order to support the family? Do none amongst us heap upon women cares and burdens such as the men alone are qualified to bear? Men are very apt to relieve themselves of their troubles; and women are by nature inclined to take anxieties upon themselves.

At the wedding feast in Cana a difficulty presented itself—the wine ran short, and our Lady became aware of the fact. She, being a woman, sympathized at once with the embarassment felt by the host, and was impelled to do her best to remove it. She revealed a truly feminine trait, one that God's hand seems to have impressed upon woman at her creation, but the more a man may admire it, the more careful should he be not to abuse his wife's emotional and sympathetic disposition by casting upon her burdens that she is unfit to bear.

We have already referred to the dissolubility of marriage among pagans. Unhappily there is great need nowadays to protest against the revival of this pagan theory. It ought not to be necessary for me to remind you of all the misery to society and to individuals that results from facilities for divorce. It is quite certain that, where the state is ready to declare marriages annulled, they are contracted recklessly. People are careless enough where the outward bond is inviolable, but when it is weakened, separation be-

comes a matter of everyday occurrence. Need I dwell upon the unhappy position of those who have separated? Need I point out what terrible consequences would ensue if still more children were to grow up without the discipline and ties of family life? History records plainly enough the disastrous results of weakening the marriage bond, but, as the saying goes, history teaches us that men refuse to learn from history.

In the Catholic Church we are taught: "What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder." But the world says: "What men have united, they may separate again." The Church regards marriage as a Sacrament instituted by God; the world looks upon it as a purely civil contract. The former is the Christian, the latter the pagan view of matrimony. The Church can never sanction the dissolution of a lawful marriage, so as to leave either party free to marry again. Separation is possible, when for some special reasons husband and wife cannot live together; but separation is not divorce, and neither party can marry again during the lifetime of the other.

Amongst Christians a wife is not a slave, and one of the greatest benefits conferred by the Church upon mankind is that she has raised woman from her former position of degradation. Christianity teaches that the whole female sex was degraded by the sin of Eve, but it teaches also that the whole sex was raised and ennobled in the person of Mary, the Mother of our Lord and Saviour; she was full of grace, blessed among women, and all generations shall call her blessed.

Man knows that his wife is "flesh of his flesh," and "bone of his bone," and St. Peter bids him give her honor. He is the head and master of the family, but, if he be a Christian, he will not ruthlessly assert his supremacy. It is his business to provide for the

support of wife and children, but he will not despise his wife's advice and disregard her wishes. He knows that husband and wife alike have mutual rights and duties; she, no less than himself, is an intelligent being, and, in the eyes of a Christian husband, her personality is sacred because God desires her salvation equally with his own. Both are sinners, in need of God's grace; for both did Jesus Christ come into the world, that with His precious Blood He might deliver them from sin, death and the dominion of satan. God wishes the wife to be the husband's co-heiress to eternal life, and the Christian husband cannot work out his own salvation without contributing also to his wife's. Thus the crown, of which paganism robbed woman, is restored to her by Christianity; and there is no happier place on earth than a home where man and wife labor together with the one aim of securing life everlasting.

Some men, however, though they profess to be Christians, do not appreciate domestic happiness, and seek their pleasure away from their own homes. Their amusements may be innocent, but it is always a misfortune when a man does not prefer his home to any other place, though this does not mean that he ought never to go out into society. Both husband and wife are sometimes obliged to do so.

Every married couple should mutually respect each other. A wife is not her husband's slave, but St. Paul writes: "Let the women learn in silence, with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to use authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed; then Eve. And Adam was not seduced, but the woman, being seduced, was in the transgression" (1 Tim. ii, 11-14). "Let women be subject to their husbands, as to the Lord, because the husband is the head of the wife" (Ephes. v, 22, 23). "As the Church is subject to Christ, so also let the wives be to

their husbands in all things" (*ibid.* v, 24). And St. Peter says: "In like manner also let wives be subject to their husbands, that if any believe not the word, they may be won without the word, by the conversation of the wives, considering your chaste conversation with fear. Whose adorning let it not be the outward plaiting of the hair, or the wearing of gold, or the putting on of apparel, but the hidden man of the heart in the incorruptibility of a quiet and meek spirit, which is rich in the sight of God. For after this manner heretofore the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection to their own husbands, as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord" (1 Peter iii, 1-6).

In our Lady we have the most perfect instance of a woman adorned with a quiet and meek spirit. At the marriage-feast she showed her interest in a matter which her Divine Son had reserved for Himself; so He said: "Woman, what is it to Me and to thee? My hour is not yet come." Without any further question or explanation she turned to the servants, saying: "Whatsoever He shall say to you, do ye." Could she have set us a better example of womanly humility, gentleness and submission?

We may believe that she treated her husband, in their quiet home, just as she treated her Divine Son at the feast, and that her meek and gentle spirit was precious in God's sight. Holy Scripture tells us that every wife should be adorned with this spirit, whereas women who love to command do not imitate the models held up to us in the Bible. As St. Peter says, a good woman's adornment consists not in anything external, but in her quiet spirit. Her true sphere of action is her home; and every woman able to work for the welfare of her household is bound to do so; this is her chief business in life, especially if she be married. In her spare time she may care for the sick and poor, and still be occupied in work befitting her

and precious in the sight of God, provided that it does not cause her to neglect her own home, and that she displays charity and humility in all that she does. Work for others is peculiarly suited to women who have not a household of their own demanding their attention. A Christian home is a sanctuary which the wife should do her best to adorn; and her efforts may render it the happiest place on earth. Its true value is seen most plainly in times of misfortune. As long as all is well with a man, he may scarcely appreciate his wife and home, but let some disaster overwhelm him and the world leave him in the lurch, his wife does not forsake him, but loves him and stands up for him, so that he finds peace at home, in spite of the storms outside. Many a man has learned in times of sorrow to thank God for blessings hitherto not valued at their true worth, perceiving that the world can offer him nothing comparable with the joy of possessing a home where a Christian wife reigns supreme.

Christianity has raised woman from a degraded position, but it has not imposed upon her the duty of attracting attention by her activity. Quite apart from Christianity, the world has attempted to improve the status of woman, but in so doing it has overlooked humility, and has taken her away from the work assigned to her by God, and given her aims and occupations identical with those of man. It is characteristic of the spirit of the age that thus no attention is paid to the plain indications of God's design. We hear much of the emancipation of women, and perhaps those who demand it have some justification for their claims. Woman is certainly entitled to receive adequate education, and to be permitted to enter careers for which her physical and intellectual powers may fit her. But one who "emancipates" herself from all laws and comes forward as man's rival in every department of public life is unworthy of the sacred position and duties of womanhood.

For married life to be what God intended, it is absolutely necessary that the marriage should be truly Christian, and this brings us to the central point of to-day's Gospel, and we see what is its chief lesson. When we read that Jesus Christ was a guest at a wedding feast, we realize that He would fain be present whenever a marriage takes place, and take up His abode in every home, so as to sanctify the union and the household with His presence. "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house" (Acts xvi, 31). Reserve for Christ a dwelling place in thy heart; let His spirit rule in thy home, and thou wilt indeed be happy. Every Christian knows by experience that happiness is to be found nowhere but with Christ, and when He reigns supreme in a household, the spirit of charity influences all its members. Follow, therefore, the example of the people in Cana, and invite Jesus Christ to your house.

Where faith is living, there is a good and happy family life, impossible under other conditions. If a worldly spirit predominates in your home, you must be worldly yourself, and in need of true conversion. Do not suppose that it is more important to practise Christian charity and forbearance anywhere else rather than at home, in your daily intercourse with your family and at your daily occupations. Invite Jesus to take up His abode with you. It was at Cana that He worked His first miracle, and His disciples believed in Him. He will work miracles in your house, too, and accomplish marvellous things, so that you will believe in Him still more firmly, the more He manifests His glory in the sanctuary of your own home.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

CONVERSION

"And when Jesus was come to the place, looking up He saw him, and said to him: Zacheus, make haste and come down, for this day I must abide in thy house."—Luke xix, 5.

"This day I must abide in thy house." That must indeed have been a happy day for Zacheus and his household. The guests at Cana were happy because Jesus was with them, and now Zacheus had the same reason for happiness; on that day salvation came to his house.

Experience teaches us that hearts and houses are happy if they welcome Jesus Christ, His spirit, influence and guidance, and it teaches also that in our own age, so full of sin and misery, sorrow makes itself most felt where there is no room for Christ. We sometimes see maps on which Christian countries are painted in bright colors and pagan lands in dark. If it were possible to prepare such a map to show where happiness and where unhappiness is to be found, the bright color indicating happiness would certainly distinguish the hearts and houses in which Christ reigns supreme, and the dark shade indicating misery would mark the hearts and houses where He is unknown. We boast of our intellectual progress, but our age abounds in wretchedness and poverty for which no remedy can be found save in Jesus Christ. Let us consider who are the fortunate persons to whom He says: "I must abide in your house."

I. Zacheus was one of them, so we may perhaps learn from him

what will induce our Lord to abide with us. Some people perceive nothing in Zacheus' desire to see Jesus but mere curiosity, and nothing in his words but self-complacency. Is this conceivable? Let us consider who the man was. We are told that he was the chief of the publicans and rich. Let us picture a man of the present day in a similar position; perhaps some respectable magistrate, whom everyone knows. Imagine such a man in the midst of a dense crowd, climbing up a tree or a fence, in order to see better, and sitting there like a street urchin. Would he not be the laughing stock of the rabble, and risk losing all his reputation? We cannot for a moment suppose that one of our magistrates would do anything of the sort; but should he really put himself in such an unpleasant situation, he would undoubtedly have some better reason for so doing than mere curiosity.

This argument may well be applied to Zacheus, who risked forfeiting all his reputation in order to see Jesus. He must have cared very much about it, and have felt it to be a matter of life and death that he should come into contact with Christ. We have here a valuable example of earnestness about salvation, for Zacheus flinched from no sacrifice, not even from the loss of human respect. How many of us would be ready to do as much to secure our salvation? Many show repugnance before they are even asked to make a sacrifice, and avoid taking up any decided position because they are afraid of offending the world, or their old friends, and fancy that people will laugh at them and think them foolish.

Jesus Christ abode gladly with Zacheus, because He saw that the man was in earnest, and that, being really anxious to follow Christ, he shrank from no sacrifice and was willing even to be despised. Go and do likewise! Be in earnest about your resolution to follow Christ and to lead a Christian life. Do not shrink in a cowardly

way from the sacrifices that it may possibly entail, and then you may be sure that Jesus will gladly take up His abode with you.

II. Zacheus said to our Lord: "If I have wronged any man of anything, I restore him fourfold."

We must not regard this as a self-satisfied statement regarding his habitual mode of action. It would only show that fraud was not profitable to him! No, it indicates that at that moment, in our Saviour's presence, Zacheus realized his guilt and saw that in many instances he had been dishonest, for, like other publicans, he had enriched himself fraudulently. Now, perceiving the wickedness of his ways, he resolved to make fourfold restitution.

This was trustworthy evidence of his conversion. A man may regret his sins, and of course his sorrow may proceed from a contrite and humble heart. He may shed tears over what he has done, and they may be the outcome of a penitent disposition. He may talk of his wickedness and unworthiness, and call himself a miserable sinner, and in all this he is following St. Paul's example. We must not, however, forget that other people may act in the same way without being so genuinely humble as the Apostle, and this perhaps is the reason why their talk of their sinfulness and unworthiness makes comparatively little impression upon us. Their tears and lamentations and self-reproaches may merely indicate some superficial kind of repentance, not true conversion of heart, and it is possible that they have never really thought about their actual transgressions. I should think far more of a man who, without perhaps giving much outward sign of regret, had courage to act like Zacheus, *i. e.,* to acknowledge his sins, not only before God, but with heroic self-humiliation also before men, and to go to those whom he had wronged or offended, asking their pardon and offering whatever reparation he could make. This man's actions would

prove his genuine conversion or change of disposition. If you would imitate Zacheus, confess your sins to God, by revealing them to His servant, one of those to whom He said: "He that heareth you, heareth me, and whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them." If you do this, the Lord will take up His abode with you, and fill your heart with gladness.

God requires of every one of us that we should acknowledge and confess our sins, resolving to avoid them in future, and that we should humble ourselves before those whom we have wronged or offended, trying, as far as it is in our power, to make reparation. No amount of tears and lamentations can ever take the place of these duties. God does not, however, require us to follow Zacheus' example and promise to give half our goods to the poor. Sometimes He counsels such a proceeding, and He even advised the rich young man to give all that he possessed to the poor. But our Lord does not demand such a renunciation; only some highly favored souls are capable of making such a sacrifice, and He promises to reward them a hundredfold. If we cannot do as much as this, we can at least be as honest and humble as Zacheus, after his conversion, and then our Lord will take a delight in abiding with us, as He did with him.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

TEMPEST AND CALM

"And immediately Jesus, stretching forth His hand, took hold of him, and said to him: 'O thou of little faith, why didst thou doubt?' And when they were come up into the boat, the wind ceased."—Matt. xiv, 31, 32.

Some of us are apt to put a very bald construction upon the events in our Lord's life, as recorded in the Gospels. We look upon them as accounts of occurrences in a far distant past, forgetting that Holy Scripture is intended for men in every age, that Christ's life and work affect the whole human race, and that His life and work are the expression of one principle, viz., of His love, which desires the salvation of all sinners. Hence we are perfectly justified in deducing from our Lord's behavior and actions on *one* occasion, His manner of acting in other cases and at other times. For instance, from to-day's Gospel, containing the account of His dealings with His disciples during the tempest, we may learn what His followers have a right to expect from Him now in any trials that may befall them.

I. *The tempest.*—The disciples set sail from the eastern shore of the Lake of Genesareth in the evening; the wind was against them, and they had to take to their oars. As darkness fell the wind increased to a gale, and though they exerted all their strength, they seemed to make no progress. Midnight passed, and by three o'clock in the morning they were still only half way across the lake. The rowers were spent, and the furious wind had lashed the water

into waves that threatened to swamp the boat. In their alarm they no doubt cried: "Lord, save us, we perish," but Jesus was not with them, and they believed Him to be far away. No one can have been at sea on such a night without experiencing some fear, but the storms of life are more terrible, and the waves of misfortune often threaten to overwhelm the frail barque on which we have set sail, anticipating a calm voyage. In such peril faith can work miracles. St. Peter walked on the water towards his Master, in spite of the raging billows. He trusted Him when He said, "Come," and his faith upheld him; but as the tempest increased, he was afraid and doubted, and at once began to sink. Then he cried out: "Lord, save me," and Jesus came to his rescue.

How differently do people behave in times of trouble, sorrow and distress of mind! Some fancy that they are sure to sink and perish, on account of their sins, and yet they are mistaken. Help is at hand, and even where sin abounds, grace doth yet more abound (Rom. v, 20).

Others, really on the point of drowning, are unaware of the fact, and think in their folly that there is no danger, because they shut their eyes to it. Finally there are some who are in great peril, and realize it with horror. They seem to feel everything giving way; they perceive the emptiness of earthly delights and are afraid. They have good cause for fear if they have set their hopes on the transitory joys of this life, and shrink in terror from the dark abyss into which they see their friends vanishing one after another. Yet people of this kind fall into two classes. Some give way to despair; a little opium or morphia enables them to pass silently into the great unknown, which is all or nothing, according to the view that they take of it. Such men have revived the old Stoic doctrine and say that they quit life when it becomes unbearable, just as they would

quit a room full of stifling smoke. As long as they live they go about with hearts devoid of hope, longing only for annihilation, and complaining that they have ever been born at all.

Others, on the contrary, cry like St. Peter, when he began to sink: "Lord, save me," and they, too, are saved.

II. *The calm.*—God helps those who have recourse to Him in their necessity. The disciples on the lake were under more efficient protection than they supposed, for Jesus was praying for them. He passed the evening and part of the night in prayer on a mountain overlooking the lake; no doubt He prayed for them more than for Himself. His prayer was their safeguard, as it is ours in time of trouble. He prayed for His own, and many of them are in heaven, joining in His supplication for us. We have innumerable helpers, but we cannot see them, and must be content to believe in them. Visible help is often not given us at once, sometimes not for a long time; our Lord allowed the disciples to toil all night, rowing in the darkness against the hurricane, and He did not come until the fourth watch, *i. e.,* between three and six o'clock in the morning.

People often say that God sends us sorrows to try us, and this is true, but it is not the whole truth. Trouble is not intended merely to show what we are good for, but to make us strong and vigorous. St. Peter might never have been able to walk on the water, had not his confidence in our Lord been strengthened by misfortune. Let us be prepared for the possibility of disaster and grievous affliction, but let us never doubt that help will come at last.

Our Lord undoubtedly helps those who cry to Him; He rescued the disciples, for the tempest abated, and, with Jesus on board, they reached the opposite shore of the lake at dawn.

One of the purest joys known to us is that which we experience on returning home after a long and perilous voyage and are wel-

comed by those dear to us. What will be our bliss when the dawn of eternity finds us entering a safe harbor, where we shall be welcomed by friends whom we have loved on earth, and where we shall hear the vault of heaven resounding with the songs of the saints, who exult and give thanks as often as a sinner finds his way home.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

THE LAW OF THE NEW DISPENSATION

"You have heard that it was said to them of old: 'Thou shalt not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whosoever shall look on a woman to lust after her, hath already committed adultery with her in his heart."—Matt. iv, 27, 28.

I. No one can read the Gospel without noticing how it abounds in exhortations to do God's will, keep His commandments and observe His law. Only one who is blind, or who wilfully shuts his eyes, can deny this fact, and yet we are often told that the Gospel abolished the law, and that if a man has faith in the Gospel he need not trouble about the law. Those who make these assertions suppose that sin cannot harm us, and has no importance in God's sight, if only we believe in His mercy, which justifies us without the works of the law. It is, however, blasphemous to maintain that sin is not harmful, and is of no importance in God's sight, and, in order to avoid such a statement, others say that under the new dispensation the law is unnecessary, because our faith makes us so ready to do God's will, that we require no admonition or law constraining us to do it. Everything is supposed to be quite simple and straightforward to a believer, and God has only to look on and see with what zeal and joy men comply with His will. There is no longer any need of law, admonition or reminders of God's holy will, and of course there need be no suggestion of punishment.

But does this really agree with the experience of believers? Can any individual honestly and seriously persuade himself that such is the case? Can any one, who has trodden the narrow path of

obedience to law, accept this theory? It seems impossible; and, if we are frank, we shall have to confess that we are after all weak and miserable creatures, in spite of knowing God's will, and that we require commands, encouragement and stimulus, and even occasionally threats, when we are tempted to go astray. It would be foolish to assume the contrary, and it would be equally foolish to imagine God to be changeable, as He would undoubtedly be, if under the old dispensation He insisted upon obedience, and under the new cared nothing whether men obeyed Him or not.

It is, however, quite certain that the New Testament, and particularly the gospels, contain many rules, precepts and strict commands. "I am not come to destroy the law," are the words uttered by Christ Himself (Matt. v, 17).

II. God's will cannot change, and hence His law too is permanent. No natural law is less liable to variation than the eternal moral law. Jesus Christ was so far from destroying the moral law that it would be true to say that He made it more stringent. We have a remarkable instance of this in to-day's gospel: "Whosoever shall look on a woman to lust after her, hath already committed adultery with her in his heart." Evil desires are here condemned—even if no outward action is performed, the desire to do is sinful, provided that the will consents to it. The law here laid down by Christ is certainly not less stringent than the commandment of the Old Testament. In both the old and the new law, God requires purity of heart as well as of body. If we compare the Christian moral code with that universally accepted by mankind, we shall find that the former makes far greater demands upon us that the latter. No human legislator has ever attempted to make evil desires, not realized in action, punishable offences, but Christianity teaches us that the wish to rob, defraud

and wrong our neighbor is a sin deserving punishment, if we do not resist it. Instead of deceiving ourselves with the mistaken idea that the law has been abolished, we had better acknowledge it to be strictly binding. Instead of resting on a belief that our freedom is subject to no restriction, we should do well to ask ourselves how we are likely to transgress the moral law. Can we be held responsible for our evil desires? Do they not suggest themselves of their own accord, since we are creatures of flesh and blood, conceived and born in sin? Have we done anything to cause them, and so made ourselves answerable for them? To a certain extent we are responsible. I do not agree with those who regard every temptation due to our corrupt nature as in itself a personal sin, for which we are personally guilty. No; this theory is, in my opinion, a lamentable exaggeration, likely to mislead the moral judgment; and opposed to all common sense; but to a certain extent it may in many cases be by our own fault that we are tempted to commit some particular sins, and that these temptations get so much hold upon us. We have it in our power to resist our sinful nature; and if we allow ourselves to be guided by the Holy Spirit, we shall indeed resist the perverse and evil desires, and prevent them from gaining influence over us. In one who is unaccustomed to struggle against it, lust is easily awakened at the slightest opportunity, whereas it can often be suppressed before it is thoroughly aroused by one who is in the state of grace, and in the habit of controlling himself.

But how can we struggle against our passions? This is an important and practical question, and the answer to it is simple: we must do our best to avoid occasions of arousing them. A man who knows by experience that he cannot trust himself to drink wine in moderation, must give it up altogether. One who cannot handle other people's money without great risk of appropriating some of

it, ought to refrain from all dealings with it. One who cannot look at a woman without lusting after her, ought to avoid seeing her. Here we have a wide field for everyday mortification, and if we shun all occasions of sin, we are struggling against our evil desires. If we do not shun them, they make themselves felt and gather strength, since they encounter no opposition. In this way we are responsible not merely for our actions, but for the awakening of our wicked thoughts.

The moral code of Christianity is truly strict enough; we need not attempt to make it more severe, as do those who regard every movement of passion as in itself a personal sin, worthy of punishment. They aim at inspiring men with a horror of all sin, but they are unsuccessful. The Gospel contains no justification for such unnatural assertions, which are contrary to our common sense, and consequently a relaxation rather than a quickening of our moral consciousness results from these theories, as from every other form of unnatural rigorism. A man who finds that he cannot check the stimulus of concupiscence, will finally despond and give up the struggle as hopeless. This may, in the case of strong, upright characters, lead to despair; in the case of weaker men, to hypocrisy.

III. The Gospel continues: "If thy right eye scandalize thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee . . . and if thy right hand scandalize thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee; for it is expedient for thee that one of thy members should perish, rather than that thy whole body go into hell." Do words such as these indicate that the law is abolished under the new dispensation? or that, if we have a law at all, it is a very easy-going one? We must not, of course, interpret the passage literally, any more than we must understand that followers of Christ must "hate" their father and mother, or that a sinner can have a beam in his eye. In the East, when a

speaker wishes to speak emphatically, he often uses language that, taken literally, would be meaningless. It is important to remember this fact, as it helps us to understand our Lord's words and other passages in Holy Scripture.

It is undeniable that we have here a very solemn demand. We ought to give up the most precious and apparently indispensable thing that we possess, rather than commit sin, or even rather than encourage, instead of suppressing, our evil thoughts and desires. This law is not abolished, but is made more emphatically binding in the New Testament. The struggle to obey it is carried on mostly in silence, unnoticed by men; it brings us no earthly reward, but it secures our heavenly crown. Many great saints, who now dwell in glory, won their crowns in the warfare against the flesh with its lusts and concupiscences. Of course God bestows the crown of life freely for Christ's sake, but we shall not receive it unless we fight the good fight and finish our course. For those only, who act thus, is the crown of justice laid up.

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

FAITHFULNESS AND ITS REWARD

"His Lord said to him: 'Well done, good and faithful servant, because thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will place thee over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.'"—Matt. xxv, 23.

I. The prophet Isaias once exclaimed: "I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength without cause and in vain" (Is. xlix, 4). Some people seem always to prosper, and go through life easily and without trouble, finding their way smooth, and never laboring in vain. Let us not grudge them their happiness; it is often a favor bestowed upon them by God, and not all of us would be capable of bearing it. Others take everything lightly, and regard their life-work superficially; they appear to succeed in all their undertakings, and yet they are not envied, for what costs one nothing, is of but little value. Others again bear the burden and heat of the day, devoting all their energy to honest work, and yet, like the prophet, when they look back they feel inclined to despond, because they perceive no result of their labors, and complain that all has been in vain, they have spent their strength to no purpose. They remember the enthusiasm and hopes of their youth, and the happiness that they anticipated for themselves and for others. What have they attained? Apparently nothing. They have toiled perhaps for some child, who has grievously disappointed them, or for the good of the state, which has given them no recognition at all in return for their services.

I may even go further and say that some who devote themselves to the service of God and to promoting the welfare of His King-

dom, meet with nothing but discouragement. Many great saints have complained of this. King David worked for God, and saw no fruit of his labors, even in his own family. He underwent the painful experience of being like a stranger among his own people, in spite of all his good intentions. "For Thy sake," he exclaimed, "I have borne reproach, shame hath covered my face; I am become a stranger to my brethren, and an alien to the sons of my mother" (Ps. lxviii, 8, 9). He lavished all his resources on God's house, but he saw no result, save the expenditure of his strength. "The zeal of Thy house hath eaten me up" (*ibid.* 10). Another holy psalmist suffered perhaps still more acutely. All his efforts were in the cause of the peace that he loved, but others hated it, and so instead of enjoying peace, war was forced upon him. Hence he complained that he had dwelt too long amongst those that hated peace. "I was peaceable," he said, "but when I spoke to them they fought against me without cause" (Ps. cxix, 7). He longed to die and escape from his persecutors, and his words remind us of those uttered by the prophet Elias, when, weary of working among the perverse people, he went out into the desert and prayed for death, saying: "It is enough for me, Lord, take away my soul" (3 Kings, xix, 4).

II. Is it not sad that men should labor under such circumstances until they are reduced to despair? Let us not be overhasty in judging them. Some really labor in vain, but have no right to complain, because their want of success is due to their own fault. In to-day's Gospel we read how the Master at His departure assigned different tasks to His servants, "to everyone according to his proper ability." But men often make the great mistake of choosing their task for themselves, instead of accepting what God imposes upon them. They do not take into account, in a rational way, the cir-

cumstances of their age and life, but act impulsively, according to the inclination of the moment. They are apt not to consider their own abilities, and so they run their head against a wall, and incur responsibilities to which they are quite unequal. Many a one relies on his own powers to accomplish something that will cause his name to be mentioned in the papers, and discussed by his neighbors. He aims at being a good man of business, a great politician, scholar, author or artist, or possibly a great swindler; nothing matters, provided that it is something great. He forgets that he is absolutely insignificant and incapable of accomplishing anything remarkable. This desire to attract attention is one of the maladies of the age in which we live, and a man who yields to it, often falls a victim to megalomania, as any specialist on brain disease can testify. But has such a person any right to complain if he does not succeed in his undertakings? No, he has much more reason to blame his own folly and to adopt another line of action. So much for those who really labor in vain.

It may, however, happen that one who is discouraged because he sees no results of his work, has not really exerted himself to no purpose. This was the case with the prophet Elias, who felt that he had wasted his energy upon a fickle and un-Godly nation. Yet he had not served God in vain, for there were still seven thousand who had not bent the knee to Baal. Only Elias did not see them, and so he was despondent. There is an old saying: "He who works for God, labors not in vain." It is a consoling proverb, and invariably true. If you can satisfy yourself that you are working for God, and trying to serve Him in all that you do, you need not be anxious about success, nor ought you to be discouraged. You will certainly reap your reward when God sees fit. "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy; going they went and wept, casting

their seeds; but coming they shall come with joyfulness, carrying their sheaves" (Ps. cxxv, 5-7). It is our business to sow and water the seed, but God alone can make it grow. Therefore be calm and continue quietly to work for Him.

Why is work for God never in vain, never without success or reward? Because He regards our fidelity in His service, not the results of our activity. This is the chief point in to-day's Gospel, "Well done, good and faithful servant; because thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will place thee over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." The faithful servant is rewarded for his fidelity, the bad steward is punished for his infidelity. To all His followers our Lord says: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life" (Apoc. ii, 10). The crown of everlasting life will be the reward of faithfulness in our life on earth.

Let us then work loyally, each in his different calling. It matters nothing *what* you are, servant or employer, scholar, laborer or official; all that matters is that you should be faithful. Do not expect to see results, nor wish men to admire your work. Expect nothing of your fellow creatures, and then they cannot disappoint you, or destroy your peace of mind. Everything depends upon your being faithful, for then your labor will be precious in God's sight, and this is enough for you, since thus you will enjoy great peace.

SEPTUAGESIMA SUNDAY

IDLENESS, WORK, WAGES

"The Kingdom of Heaven is like to a householder, who went out early in the morning to hire laborers into his vineyard. And having agreed with the laborers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And going out about the third hour, he saw others standing in the market-place idle, and he said to them: Go ye also into my vineyard, and I will give you what shall be just."—Matt. xx, 1-4.

I. *Idleness.*—Not long ago I read a characteristic description of modern life; it was to this effect: A man sits by the seashore one morning in summer. All is peaceful around, but he is conscious of nothing save that there is a profound silence about him. In a sort of day-dream he gazes at the blue ocean and the cloudless sky. What is he thinking of? Nothing. We might continue the story and add that he was in the springtide of life, the sixth hour of the day, but he thought of nothing worthy of consideration, and so the springtide passed away. The ninth hour came and found him in all the vigor of manhood. We see him entering a restaurant, the favorite rendezvous of the men about town. It is a fashionable place, and he meets many acquaintances there. He is pale and tired after all the gaiety of the evening before. He orders the same dish as his friends—something pungent, washed down with spirits, just enough to revive his energy for fresh amusements. Throughout the day his one occupation is to seek entertainment; in the evening he visits friends or some unhappy girl who loves and trusts him, but, after leading her astray, he casts her aside,

and turns to fresh acquaintances, as he has done many times before. Thus he passes the years of his manhood, until at last the eleventh hour arrives, and he begins to grow old; he is tired of life, worn out in body and mind, although his passions are not yet extinct. He has lost all power of enjoyment, and feels existence to be a horrible, unendurable burden. He wonders how he can most easily put an end to it; will a pistol-shot or a few drops of poison serve his purpose best? He dies, and his boon companions remark that they would not have thought it of him.

He is indeed one of those who stood all day long idle in the market place. We need hardly discuss such a man, were it not for the strange opinion current in the world that a life of this sort is far from reprehensible. Those who take this view consider life in itself to be so detestable that every one ought to make it as endurable as possible for himself. Hence, they say, enjoy it as long as you can enjoy it, and when you are incapable of enjoyment, depart by some painless form of death. Such is the morality taught in the 20th century by those who refuse to accept the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The young imbibe this fatal doctrine from innumerable novels, papers and magazines.

Another man toils early and late for himself and his family; he allows himself no recreation, and far less any amusement. He is urged on by an insatiable desire to make money. Can he be described as standing idle in the market place? The very suggestion seems absurd, and yet it is true in the Gospel sense, if he really cares for nothing but acquiring wealth; if he has never seriously tried to gain what is better than money, he is, in spite of all his exertions, an idler, in the meaning assigned to the word in the parable. Another man lives for the state, and devotes himself to the public welfare, promoting all kinds of useful reforms and advo-

cating what he calls progress. He gives himself no rest, but is always making speeches, writing to the newspapers, or compiling books on trade, education, taxation and politics. He derives very little pleasure and a great deal of trouble from his activity, but he intends to do some great work in the world. Yet he is an idler according to the Gospel, if he cares only to accomplish some great undertaking in this world, and overlooks the one thing needful, the salvation of his soul. If he were the most important man on earth, he would still be lower than the least in the kingdom of heaven who takes pains to save his soul.

II. *Work.*—After what has been said, perhaps you will expect me, when I speak of work, to represent it as something altogether different from our ordinary occupations, as having nothing to do with our everyday pursuits, and as the one thing needful in contrast to them, so that they will appear insignificant and unessential, and likely to hinder and interrupt our one supreme task of securing our salvation.

Such is, however, by no means my intention. Of course certain hours and seasons must be devoted to the care of our souls, hours of quiet self-examination, meditation and prayers, hours spent solely in the service of God, either at home or in His house, when all worldly occupations must be set aside. But it is no less important that thoughts of our final end should penetrate and sanctify our daily work; it is quite possible to combine the promotion of God's glory and of our salvation with the discharge of domestic work or the duties of a tradesman, artisan or politician. This fact is apt to be ignored, and people think of work in the world and work in God's service as two quite distinct and mutually antagonistic things, whereas each ought to be a support to the other.

You should learn therefore how to sanctify all that you do, even

your worldly occupations, no matter what they are, if only they are honest. You should learn, too, how to control your passions, to mortify your desires and to subdue your evil thoughts. You should learn to think good and not evil of others, to love and not to hate, and to be silent or reply with friendly words when spiteful remarks are made. You should learn to labor with the intention of doing your duty to God, instead of aiming only at your own pleasure and profit. In this way you will be working for the good of your soul in the midst of your ordinary pursuits, you will be a laborer in God's vineyard, and you will benefit your country and those about you. If everyone acted thus, our native land would become God's vineyard, where all might live and toil in happiness.

The final end of every such laborer is to serve God, and in serving Him he enjoys peace and happiness in this world and in the next life everlasting.

III. *Wages.*—In the evening the Lord of the vineyard will pay each laborer his wages. How is the amount due to each reckoned? According to the fidelity with which he has worked, not according to the quantity accomplished. This is stated plainly in the Gospel, and should afford us much consolation. The servant who had worked faithfully for one hour received as much as those who had borne the burden and heat of the day. Is not this a comforting thought to one who has worked hard and yet feels that all is in vain, and that he has accomplished almost nothing. The very sense of failure is good for him, since it keeps him humble, and prevents any thoughts of his own ability and skill. When all goes well with us, we are only too ready to forget that everything depends ultimately upon God's grace, and that it is by a great favor that we are called to work in His vineyard. If we overlook this fact, the end may be that the first will be last. Be therefore faithful unto

death, whether you began to labor in the morning or at the eleventh hour. The results may be great, small or almost imperceptible, but that matters nothing, if only you are faithful. He is faithful who promised that those who have served Him well shall enter into the joy of their Lord.

SEXAGESIMA SUNDAY

DISTRESSED AND SCATTERED

"Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He may send forth laborers into His harvest."—Matt. ix, 38.

I. *Distressed.*—At the present day many have no faith, and hence they have no fixed centre in their spiritual life. They are deeply distressed and unhappy, and can not completely hide their misery from themselves or others. There is much that calls for criticism in modern literature, but in one respect it is better than the earlier style, known as romantic, because it is more true. French authors especially, in spite of all their frivolity, depict with appalling plainness the absolute wretchedness of human beings who have no faith in the word of God. There is an unmistakable note of despair in many recent books.

Jesus Christ came to satisfy the craving of the human soul for a Divine revelation, and He sent His Apostles forth into the world to preach the kingdom of God, *i. e.*, to make God known to all who were in misery through knowing Him not. Our text shows, however, that Christ attached the utmost importance not only to their preaching about God, but to their doing so as commissioned by God to proclaim His word. Thus there would be something definite upon which everyone could lay hold, and a pure spring, whence all might quench their thirst.

This is why our Saviour said: "Pray ye the Lord of the harvest, that He may send forth laborers into His harvest." God intends to send forth those who are to preach the kingdom of heaven, and the

work was set on foot by our divine Lord, who chose out, trained and consecrated His Apostles, and commissioned them to preach Him and His kingdom. Before His ascension He gathered them around Him and repeated the instructions already given them, adding: "Behold, I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world." How can He be with His Apostles to the end of the world? He will be with those who are to continue the work of the Apostles, the first witnesses to Christ. And who are they? Just as Christ chose out His Apostles, so did they in their turn choose their successors, and by the laying on of hands impart to them their commission and consecration. For instance, Christ Himself selected St. Paul to be an Apostle, and he chose Timothy and Titus to succeed him, and consecrated them and charged them explicitly to choose and consecrate others to be their successors. In this way there has always been a constant succession of witnesses to God's truth, men who alone possess authority and consecration, conferred upon them by Jesus Christ, and not assumed arbitrarily by themselves. They are the inheritors of the promise: "Behold, I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world." Christ's Apostles bequeathed to us their doctrine, and their successors have continued their work, which is a sacred inheritance, fraught with blessings to the Church in every age, since the revealed word has been handed down from generation to generation, both in Holy Scripture and by oral tradition.

Can we doubt that in the Church of Christ we possess what we need—information regarding God and His kingdom, and this information is trustworthy, because it is given us by God Himself. Wherefore "continue in those things which thou hast learned and which have been committed to thee, knowing of whom thou hast learned them" (2 Tim. iii, 14), *viz.*, of one who possessed in a

special degree the ability, will and authority to preach, not merely the truth, but truth Divinely revealed.

There is a majesty in this inheritance, which the world neither knows nor suspects. Jesus Christ is the "Word" of God, and this is the "Word" proclaimed in His Church by His lawful ministers, to whom He has promised that He will abide with them for ever, even to the consummation of the world. If the world, that fancies itself so wise and enlightened, had any idea of the majesty of this inheritance, it would not hesitate to seek out the kingdom of God. But do all, who call themselves Christians, rightly appreciate the Apostolic office of the Church? No; the majority do not, and this reflection can only fill us with alarm, since these are the people of whom St. Paul says that according to their own desires they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears to hear only what pleases them. They care nothing from whom they derive their theories, and do not ask whether their teachers are duly commissioned by God, and consequently trustworthy. The creed of the Church falls on deaf ears or is altogether rejected, whilst human utterances are eagerly accepted, applauded and proclaimed from the housetops. Is it not sad to see men languishing in ignorance, although the word of God is constantly preached in their midst?

There is another thing, also calculated to fill us with horror. Some profess to base all their faith upon the Bible alone; but no book in the world has suffered such ill usage as the Bible. We might understand an agnostic's attitude towards it, but it seems incomprehensible that those who claim to derive all their Christianity from the Bible, treat it as they do. They depreciate its value, criticize it unmercifully, and deny that we can rely upon its being wholly the word of God. Is this not equivalent to cutting off the branch on which one is sitting?

Unless these people return to the old faith of the Church and regard the Bible as the Word of God, there is no help for them. We cannot doubt that many who criticise revealed truth, whether recorded in Holy Scripture or handed down by tradition, are in good faith, and believe that such criticism does not imperil their hold upon Christianity. But faith not based on a perfectly firm foundation, such as God has given us in a supernatural manner, must finally end in deception.

II. *Scattered.*—Jesus Christ felt the deepest sympathy with the multitudes, who were not only distressed, but also scattered, like sheep without a shepherd. It is a great misfortune for a man to drift through life, tossed this way and that, a prey to his own fancies and self-deceptions. Yet this is inevitably the lot of those who recognize no Divine revelation and no Divinely commissioned guides.

We are all irresistibly impelled to seek companionship in faith, learning and life; it is terrible to stand alone; and yet this is the position of those who refuse to accept Divine revelation and to submit to the Church's guidance, preferring to think for themselves on the most important matters. Literature has a great influence upon modern lines of thought, but nowadays there is something in it suggestive of exhaustion; formerly men adhered more or less to definite methods, now they have abandoned them as unsatisfactory. They no longer assert anything to be true, but they ask, "What is truth?" without, however, venturing to answer the question.

Jesus Christ sent out His servants to bear testimony both to God and His kingdom. The Apostles were to be witnesses to what was common to many and yet one (for no society can exist without unity), and this unity was to appear in the life, faith, hope and

charity of the Church. Our Lord knew what men required, *viz.*, union and unity, and we find both in the Church that He established. It was not His will that men should perish like sheep straying each his own way, and so He founded the Church whose prosperity and strength consists to a great extent in her unity, and in the union of our hearts with God.

The Church has always preserved her unity, though she has suffered grievous losses in consequence of men's disloyalty. Should she regain what she originally possessed when all professing to be Christians acknowledged her as their mother, she would be the greatest power in the world, able to make the desert blossom like a rose. We have indeed cause to regret that the idea of union and unity, which was present in our Lord's mind when He founded His Church, is so little understood. People seem not to realise it, and not to appreciate the value of unity; although it is plainly stated in Christ's prayer: "Not for them only do I pray, but for them also who through their word shall believe in me; that they all may be one, as Thou, Father, in Me, and I in Thee; that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me. And the glory which Thou hast given Me, I have given to them; that they may be one, as We also are one. I in them, and Thou in Me; that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me, and hast loved them, as Thou hast loved Me" (John xvii, 20-23).

Our Saviour could not have given more touching expression to His desire for unity among His followers than He did in these words, uttered when He was about to withdraw from them His visible presence. The unity among Christians was to be a marvel to the whole world, sufficient to convert it to faith in Christ. Is this not a testimony to the incalculable value of unity?

We seem to catch an echo of our Lord's words in St. Paul's admonition to the Ephesians (iv, 1-6): "I therefore, a prisoner in the Lord, beseech you that you . . . be careful to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. One body and one Spirit, as you are called in one hope of your calling. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all." To the Corinthians he writes (1 Cor. i, 10): "I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no schisms among you, but that you be perfect in the same mind and in the same judgment." And to the Philippians (ii, 1, 2): "If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of charity, if any society of the spirit . . . fullfil ye my joy, that you be of one mind, having the same charity, being of one accord, agreeing in sentiment."

Is it possible for any one, after reading these passages, to doubt that the restoration of the original Apostolic unity among Christians ought to be the object of our most fervent prayers?

But can we, as individuals, do anything to promote this unity? Is the harm now not irreparable? Is not the prejudice against the Church too deep to be overcome by any human effort? I can only reply that when we are brought face to face with an unquestionable duty, we *can* perform it, for God never asks us to do what is beyond our strength. St. Peter charges us to be "ready always to satisfy everyone that asketh a reason of that hope which is in us" (1 Peter iii, 15). The opponents of the Church must first of all be convinced that many of their prejudices are due to their failure to understand her teaching and practices, and that it is not fair to impute to her the errors of her frail and faulty members in every age. We must impress upon our critics the duty of hearing what the Church herself has to say on certain questions, and of not

listening exclusively to her antagonists. It is impossible to arrive at a fair decision without considering both sides; any other opinion will inevitably be prejudiced.

Much good can be effected by the removal of misunderstandings and prejudices; but, when we exert ourselves to promote unity, let us beware of forgetting the Apostle's exhortation to gentleness. Otherwise we shall do more harm than good to the cause that we have at heart. Finally we must remember that we are ordered to pray as well as to work—*ora et labora,* and prayer comes first. It is the duty of every Christian to pray daily for the unity of the Church.

May God have mercy on us all, on those within and those without the fold! My firm belief is that if a loud, unanimous prayer for unity arose from all our hearts, the Lord of the sheepfold would hear and answer it. He expects us to pray thus, for He once implored His heavenly Father that all men might be one. If only this wish were fulfilled, the miracle would be accomplished, and a happier day would dawn for all who are now scattered and distressed.

QUINQUAGESIMA SUNDAY

THE BAPTISM OF CHRIST

"Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to the Jordan, unto John, to be baptized by him."—Math. iii, 13.

"I ought to be baptized by Thee, and Thou comest to me?" St. John greeted our Saviour with these words, and we can easily understand why he did so. Jesus is always coming to us, and seeking us, although He has no need of us. He does not wait for us to seek Him, although we require Him, if we are to be saved. If He did not seek us first, we should never have recourse to Him, and He tells us this plainly: "Behold, I stand at the gate and knock. If any man shall hear my voice and open to me the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him and he with me" (Apoc. iii, 20). It would seem more natural for us to stand at His door, humbly knocking and asking to be admitted to our Father's house; but no,—He comes first to look for us; He comes day after day, and especially on Sunday, when He is in our midst, teaching us and offering us the means of grace, visiting us in all His mercy and truth, and calling us to Himself.

It would be well for us if we appreciated His goodness and condescension, His compassion and unfailing charity, and if we did so, we should exclaim, like St. John: "Lord, I have need of Thee, and comest Thou to me?" The baptism of Christ marks His public appearance as the Lamb of God, the *Agnus Dei,* for it was then that He entered upon His public ministry.

I. *The Meaning of His Baptism to Christ Himself.*—Our Lord

came to receive the baptism of John, which was the baptism of penance for the remission of sins (Luke iii, 3), and intended for sinners, who sought forgiveness by means of penance. John saw before him a crowd of people weighed down by the burden of guilt and desiring relief; and amongst them was Jesus Christ. How could He come to receive baptism for the remission of sins? He was absolutely sinless; His justice was free from all stain; why should He come to St. John? He could not indeed, strictly speaking, receive baptism for the remission of sins, and yet in another sense it is true to say that He bore a load of sin heavier than that borne by any of the others who came to receive baptism at the hands of St. John. He was the Lamb of God, and His burden, consisting of the sin and guilt of the whole world, was destined to crush Him and cause His death. It was not under the weight of His own sins that He suffered, but under that of the sins of the world, —including yours and mine.

But did He really come to seek remission of sins? Yes; if we consider the facts carefully, we shall see that He came to St. John, as He had come into the world, to obtain remission of the sins of others, not of His own. God's designs are so wonderful that we could never imagine them for ourselves, but they are at the same time so wise that, when once they have been revealed to us, we are forced to acknowledge them to be precisely adapted to supply our needs, since we are sinners, incapable of ever making reparation sufficient to secure our eternal salvation.

II. *The Meaning of Christ's Baptism to Us.*—We must bear in mind that He was the Lamb of God, and over Him hovered the Holy Spirit, whilst God's voice resounded from heaven. Our Lord was the Lamb of God, the Victim making atonement for our sins, and making it completely, though not so that all the punishment

due to sin should be removed. We were not to be spared the discipline of suffering and death, for it is good for us to do penance. "All chastisement for the present indeed seemeth not to bring with it joy, but sorrow; but afterwards it will yield, to them that are exercised by it, the most peaceable fruit of justice" (Heb. xii, 11). The Lamb of God, however, took away the sentence condemning us to everlasting death, so that now we can bear chastisement in this world under the Cross of Christ. Sometimes His friends receive such abundant grace that they delight in the Cross, and, like St. Paul, rejoice in their sufferings (Col. i, 24); and then they experience heavenly consolation, for behind the Cross they behold the radiance of the crown reserved for those who are faithful. There will be no more death for those who believe in the Lamb of God.

The Holy Spirit hovered over our Lord at His baptism, as a pledge that He will come to us also, bringing life and strength. We have been baptized in the name of Him who received baptism for our sake, and was consecrated to be our Redeemer, and to bear His Cross for us. At our baptism the same Spirit bestowed upon us strength to bear our crosses for God's sake, and this is our highest honor. God's Holy Spirit consecrated Christ to sacrifice His life for us, and the same Spirit enables us to sacrifice something in token of our love and gratitude to Him. This thought should bring glory and happiness to all who suffer. God's voice resounded from heaven, saying: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Have these words any application to us? Yes, if we believe in the Lamb of God, who opened to us the gate of heaven that our sins had closed. Our offences are countless as the sand on the seashore, and they cry to heaven against us. But if you sigh under their burden, long for forgiveness and confess

your transgressions to the priest appointed by God, heaven will be opened above you also in the holy Sacrament of Penance; and you, too, will hear the gracious words: "This is my beloved child, in whom I am well pleased." Blessed and praised, therefore, be Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, who taketh away our sins!

When Jesus came forward to receive baptism from St. John, He solemnly proclaimed to every generation of men that He was the *Agnus Dei,* who had taken upon Himself the burden of our sins, in order to obtain forgiveness of them from God. All the teaching of the gospel was summed up at His baptism, which thus appeals to the conscience of every individual; for there is no one without a burden of sin to cast upon the Lamb of God, who alone can make atonement and secure our salvation.

Thus Christ's baptism is a protest against the unbelief of the present day,—a protest against all who deny the atonement, and by all kinds of specious arguments undermine the sure foundation of our salvation.

At His baptism our Lord was consecrated to perform His task of reconciliation, receiving this consecration when His heavenly Father acknowledged His sonship. He was called the Son in order to be consecrated as the Lamb of God, and to obtain for us the right to be regarded as God's children, whereas we were previously prodigals who had strayed from the fold.

The public recognition of our Lord by His heavenly Father was intended to strengthen Him against the temptations awaiting Him, —temptations in the wilderness, temptations throughout His life, and the supreme temptation encountered at His Passion and Death. He received His consecration when the Holy Spirit descended upon Him, the same Spirit that once at the Creation hovered over the waters, breathing into matter the breath of life. That same Spirit

of life, whose property it is always to impart life, descended upon Christ, not to bestow on Him a life that He did not already possess, but to strengthen His life, and give Him the peculiar vital force necessary for Him to have, if He was to triumph over death, and accomplish our salvation, His new creation.

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

JOY

"Rejoice in this, that your names are written in heaven."—Luke x, 20.

"He said to the woman: Thy faith hath made thee safe, go in peace."—Luke vii, 50.

The season of Lent reminds us of the sufferings of Christ, endured for our sins, and so it suggests penance and sorrow for sin. Rightly considered, however, the sorrow should not be such as to exclude joy. Our Lord Himself said: "When you fast, be not as the hypocrites, sad . . . but . . . anoint thy head and wash thy face" (Matth. vi, 16, 17). He certainly did not intend either the sorrow or the joy to be hypocritical, but He did not wish Christians to repress, in a forced and unnatural manner, the joy that dwells permanently in their hearts. Joy is the keynote of to-day's Gospel: "Rejoice in this, that your names are written in heaven." This joy is often felt in the midst of pain and suffering; it is like a smile amidst tears.

I. Our Lord says: "I saw satan like lightning falling from heaven." These words are a source of joy, for satan's fall typifies the eventual conquest of evil, and foreshadows the future kingdom of God, where there will be no trace of wickedness and sin. The modern view of life is quite different, and suggests other prospects. It understands nothing of life or of death, since it regards all our existence as a mystery, incapable of explanation, and suicide as the only means of escape. Men are tossed to and fro, falling without resistance into sin after sin, and living in a state of misery

that is only occasionally interrupted by a period of sensual enjoyment. Such a life is not worth living, and death is a plunge into the unknown.

Modern unbelief looks forward to nothing but complete and interminable darkness, whereas Christianity leads us on into full and everlasting light. This prospect affords us much comfort, especially when our way seems long and dreary. It is hard to understand how any one can be contented with the dull and joyless theories of unbelievers, who can discover no meaning in life. If life has any meaning, its aim must be light rather than darkness, and the light must triumph over the darkness, not the darkness over the light. Our own hearts tell us that this must be so, and Christ's assurance is another source of joy and consolation.

But is the world mistaken when it declares that Christians stake everything upon the future and eternity, and that they seek consolation in this thought and care nothing for the world, which they regard as a place of misery? Such a theory is not quite accurate. Our Lord did indeed say that His followers would encounter serpents and scorpions and powerful enemies, but at the same time He assured them that nothing should harm them.

It is the constant experience of those who believe in Him that He is true to His promises, and this is a source of much joy to them here on earth. The viper that attacked St. Paul at Malta did not injure him (Acts xxviii, 3-7). When St. Peter was in prison, an angel came to break his chains and set him free. A spirit of satan was permitted to buffet St. Paul, but by increasing his humility, the result was beneficial (2 Cor. xii, 7). St. Theresa suffered much, but yet she asked to die rather than be free from suffering; many holy martyrs have sung hymns of praise in prison and at the stake; in short, in every age, the servants of God have

often, like Ezechiel, found themselves to be amidst scorpions, when they fancied that they were surrounded by friends. That they should be grieved is only natural, but the venom of wickedness and slander was powerless to hurt them, and so they were constrained to rejoice and give thanks, not only in the midst and in spite of tribulations, but actually on account of them.

The world is utterly unable to understand this, for it never experiences anything of the kind, and so it speaks of fanaticism and madness when any one is glad of misfortune, or gives thanks for sickness, poverty, insults and humiliations, or even for hatred and persecution on the part of those who seemed to be friends and brethren. How can people be glad, when they have far more reason to exclaim like David: "Wo is me, that my sojourning is prolonged; I have dwelt with the inhabitants of Cedar; my soul hath been long a sojourner. With them that hated peace I was peaceable; when I spoke to them they fought against me without cause" (Ps. cxix, 5, 6). How is thankfulness possible for one who might say with the psalmist: "Friend and neighbor thou hast put far from me, and my acquaintance, because of misery" (Ps. lxxxvii, 19).

II. The world cannot understand how suffering can give rise to joy, but those who comprehend it would not on any account be deprived of their pain. These are true Christians who know that they have a God, at once merciful and just;—merciful enough to forgive His children their sins, and not condemn them to everlasting death, but also bound in justice to inflict some temporal punishment upon them. The longer and more severe this punishment is, the greater is their hope of being admitted without further delay to the joy of their Lord. This hope fills them with joy and thankfulness in spite of their tribulations, and, like St. Paul, they glory in them, "knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience trial, and

trial hope, and hope confoundeth not" (Rom. v, 3-5). Patience, trial and hope are the salutary fruits of tribulation, which thus becomes actually a reason for rejoicing.

III. There is still another sense in which suffering may be called a source of joy to the servants of Christ. Have you ever meditated on that glorious passage in St. Paul's epistle to the Colossians (i, 24), where he says: "I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up those things that are wanting of the sufferings of Christ, in my flesh, for His body, which is the Church, whereof I am made a minister!" The sufferings of Christ's servants are beneficial not only to themselves, but also to others, and to the Church and the whole cause of Christ, for which they labor.

This is perhaps the greatest praise that can be given to suffering as a source of joy. When we suffer for any cause, we benefit that cause; and when we suffer for the Church of Christ, we benefit that Church. Surely everyone who suffers in so good a cause will rouse himself, pluck up fresh courage and, with renewed faith, confidence and thankfulness for his affliction, continue his labors, instead of complaining and lamenting with the children of this world. We often hear that a man's readiness to suffer for the cause that he has in hand is a recommendation of that cause; but perhaps we have never realized the full significance of this saying, according to the word of God.

IV. We must, however, guard against misunderstanding. It is with shame, rather than triumph, that we ought to speak of suffering as a source of joy and strength. It is undoubtedly the source of both, and an upright character is developed by struggles with obstacles of every kind, not by a life of ease and luxury. Why then ought we to be ashamed to speak of the benefits of tribulation? Because we so rarely experience them, and derive

from sorrow so little joy, hope and courage. Here and there perhaps we may feel a touch of happiness when our plans are thwarted, and then our joy is so great as to compensate us for many weary hours of anxiety. But we might experience far more joy, strength, encouragement and hope, if only we were more ready to suffer. Let us acknowledge with shame that this is the truth.

All Christ's followers should be glad that their names are written in heaven, in the book of life, and should "glory in the hope of the glory of the sons of God" (Rom. v, 2). "The sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come, that shall be revealed to us" (Rom. viii, 18). May this magnificent thought encourage us in all our trials, and then in both joy and sorrow we shall ever draw nearer to God, until at last the shadows and darkness of this life pass away and give place to the light that has no ending.

Therefore with St. Paul I call upon all who suffer in Christ to rejoice in the Lord always, in prosperity and in adversity, in life and in death, "again I say, rejoice" (Phil. iv, 4).

SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

GRATITUDE FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SIN

"He said to the woman: Thy faith hath made thee safe, go in peace."—Luke vii, 50.

The woman of whom we read in to-day's Gospel must have had some very strong motive for acting as she did, for her behavior attracted much attention. In the house of a wealthy man a banquet was being served, when a woman made her way to the room and even to the table. Without a word of excuse or apology to the host, she approached one of the guests, and began to show him peculiar honor by anointing his feet. Neither her rank nor her circumstances seemed to justify her proceeding; she was simply an intruder, known in the town as a sinner, and she risked being unceremoniously turned out of the house. She knew this well enough, but nothing could prevent her from honoring this particular guest. Must she not have had strong reasons for doing so?

Are we Christians all equally eager to come to Christ? I do not ask whether we are ready to suffer the indignity of being treated like a dog, and driven out, but only whether we are willing to bear a contemptuous remark or a scornful smile, when we have an opportunity of publicly serving or honoring our Lord? Or do we shrink back, and prefer to secure the world's friendship, instead of exposing ourselves to its ridicule?

The woman who came to our Saviour must have had a strong motive for doing what was not only unusual, but actually humiliating. Her emotion caused her to weep as she knelt at our Lord's feet, and, having no cloth at hand to wipe away the tears, she

unloosened her hair, and dried His feet with it. It was considered a great disgrace for a Jewish woman to appear in public with her hair loose. One needs to have a strong will and ardent love, if one is to do a thing regarded by the world as shameful, although it may be innocent enough in itself. The woman possessed the will and the love that were necessary. Do we possess them, also?

St. Mark, too, relates a similar occurrence and say that the ointment which the woman poured on our Saviour's head was worth 300 pence, or about 50 dollars. The value of money was then much greater than it is now, so we can form some idea of the sum spent upon showing outward honor to our Lord; it was a display of what we may call the luxury of love, piety and adoration. A few mean-spirited spectators termed it a foolish waste of money, but St. Mark tells us that Jesus rebuked them, and said, "She hath wrought a good work upon me." Are we willing to make sacrifices for the sake of the worship and house of God? Things might be worse than they are in our churches, but they might be and ought to be better; and the same complaint is still heard, that it is a waste of money, which could be spent better in some other way. Yet,—and this is conclusive—Jesus sanctions the expenditure. The woman made an extraordinary sacrifice in order to testify her love and respect for Jesus, but we act often as if we were quite indifferent; are we not guilty of a want of love?

II. Would it not be well if we could display the same heroic, ardent love? Every Christian ought at least to wish to do so, and the Gospel teaches us how to attain to it. It must be by the same means as the debtor, whose vast debt was remitted, and the woman in to-day's Gospel. She loved our Lord most fervently because He had visited her with His grace, and so she had come to Him. She believed in Him as the Son of God, she confessed her sins to Him

and received from His lips the assurance that she was forgiven. She had no doubt as to her sins and their forgiveness; her love was the outpouring of her gratitude for Christ's Divine compassion in stooping to pardon her, and it became to her the source of fresh grace.

We possess similar means of obtaining forgiveness in the Sacrament of Penance; and if nevertheless there is in many cases very little joy in the Lord, very little grateful love, and very little readiness to bear and sacrifice anything for Him, something must be out of order, either with our acknowledgment of guilt, or with our reception of pardon, or perhaps with both.

Is something wrong with our acknowledgment of sin? The woman in the Gospel saw her sins plainly, and was sorry for them. If we are lacking in clear perception of and true contrition for the actual sins that we have committed, and content ourselves with a vague and general confession of guilt,—if we regret in a general way the sinfulness of the human race, though we may depict it in the gloomiest colors, our recognition of sin remains something impersonal, which affects us but slightly, and does not rouse us to earnest, personal contrition.

Is something wrong with our reception of forgiveness? The woman was perfectly convinced that Christ had come to her and said: "Thy sins are forgiven thee," so that thus she had received from Him pardon of all her sins. It does no good to investigate matters for oneself, and to test the degree of one's emotions, so as to find out whether one may really expect pardon or not; it is far better to go straight to our Lord, to hear His word and receive His forgiveness. It is the happy privilege of the children of holy Church to be free to do this; and then our Lord comes to us, as He came to the penitent woman. He has given His servants

authority to forgive sins in His name, and no one else possesses this power. Only believe with simple faith what the words of Absolution mean, and then your soul will be filled with light and joy. Come to the throne of grace, the confessional, standing in God's house; bend your knees and humbly confess the sins that you have committed, and the more clear and certain the pardon that you receive in our Lord's own words, the greater will be its effect on your soul, and you will begin to love Christ, as the sinful woman loved Him, and, like her, you will feel impelled to offer Him the sacrifice of thanksgiving all the days of your life.

THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

"WHOSOEVER COMMITTETH SIN, IS THE SERVANT OF SIN"

"Jesus answereth them: Amen, amen, I say unto you, that whosoever committeth sin, is the servant of sin. Now the servant abideth not in the house forever. but the son abideth forever. If, therefore, the son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed."—John x, 34-36.

I. *The Bondage of Sin.*—It would not be so difficult to convince the world of sin (John xvi, 8), if it perceived itself to be in bondage, but men are never tired of protesting that they are free. We are, of course, speaking of bondage and freedom in the spiritual, not in the worldly sense, and in this sense a life of sin is a life of bondage. The world fancies that it is free, and boasts of its freedom of thought, speech and action. I suppose that a man chained to a stake might also boast of his freedom to go as far as his chain allows; and those who talk of freedom in a state of sin act in very much the same way. We hear of freedom of thought, but when a man's whole intellectual life is defiled by sin, he is the slave of an evil spirit. What about freedom of speech? If a man takes pleasure in giving utterance to the suggestions of egotism, vanity and sensuality, he is a slave to evil. Does he enjoy freedom of action? No; if all that he does is prompted by the same spirit as are his thoughts and words, he is in bondage to wickedness. There is a chain stronger than steel, and many a slave has tried in vain to break it, and has desisted at last, acknowledging it to be too strong. This is the chain of self-love; generous souls are willing to admit that self love is a sin, disfiguring and debasing the heart. Love imparts to life all its dignity, nobility and beauty, and makes

it happy; whereas self-love is a sort of magic circle, beyond which purely natural life cannot go. You may succeed in ridding yourself of some kinds of bonds, but by your own unaided efforts you will never break the fetters of self-love.

Slavery to sin increases in severity, and experience teaches us that a besetting sin obtains an ever greater hold upon its victim. When once free rein is given to it, the task of checking it becomes more and more difficult, and the sinful action. that at first arouses feelings of anxious fear, is finally performed with perfect indifference. I once heard a friend remonstrating with a drunkard, who answered: "It is all of no use." "Why?" "Because I do not wish to break myself of the habit." "You do not wish to break yourself of it; why not?" "Because I am not able to use my will." Does not this remark reveal the terrible bondage of sin?

Servitude to sin may reveal itself outwardly. The faces of some men bear so unmistakably the stamp of pride, arrogance and passion, that one feels impelled to exclaim: "No clean-minded person could possibly look like that!"

No one can be a slave to sin without being also a slave to the devil, for he is the prince of this world, a liar and the father of lies. He acquires his slaves by means of falsehood; by his lies he caused the ancestors of our race to fall into sin; he lied when he tempted Jesus Christ in the wilderness, and he still lies when he tempts us, for he offers us pleasures that experience proves worthless. He scores his greatest success when he so far misleads men as to make them deceive themselves, and believe that thy are free, when they are really his slaves.

II. *The Truth Shall Make You Free.*—Through falsehood we become slaves, and nothing but the truth can make us free, as Christ tells us in to-day's Gospel. What truth is this? The truth regard-

ing sin and grace. There is no real freedom as long as self-deception lasts, with its spurious liberty. It behooves us to see what we are in the light of truth, and we shall have to acknowledge that we are slaves to self-love, in a bondage that renders us guilty in God's sight, whether our self-love appears in all its naked ugliness, or is veiled under the semblance of refinement. The more fully we recognize our guilt, the greater is our prospect of deliverance. Every step into the hell of self-knowledge is equivalent to ten steps in the direction of the paradise of grace.

A true penitent, who cries from the depths of his soul: "My fault, my fault, my most grievous fault," often needs only to be reminded of the Man of Sorrows, of whom it was written: "He was wounded for our iniquities, and bruised for our sins; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him." One glance at our Lord is often enough to secure peace, healing through His wounds, and relief from the crushing weight of sin. A true penitent finds release and safety in the Sacrament of Penance, realizing that his Saviour is ready to utter the words of Absolution, and to deliver him from the guilt of punishment of sin, since He, the Lamb of God, has Himself made atonement for the sins of the whole world.

Yet it is not enough to be delivered from the guilt and punishment of sin; we need also to be released from its power, as otherwise we shall fall back into our former state of slavery. This release can be effected only by the force of truth, the same truth of Christianity. If we know that a life of self-love is a life of slavery, we know, too, that only a life of love is a life of freedom. It would be useless to attempt to break the fetters of sin and live for God, unless God had given us some great gift arousing our gratitude and love for Him. This great gift is the salvation procured for us by Jesus Christ, and, if we perceive this truth clearly,

we shall be filled with thankfulness and love, and be moved to deny ourselves and obey God. Our Lord states in to-day's Gospel the condition that He has laid down: "If you continue in My word"—His word is truth; He is Himself the way. the truth and the life. Our freedom is not yet perfect; we can only hope to enjoy perfect freedom hereafter. Even St. Paul complains: "I do not that good which I will, but the evil which I hate, that I do." "Unhappy man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. vii, 15, 24).

In our text we are told: "If the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed." We shall not enjoy absolute liberty until we have laid aside what St. Paul calls the body of this death, and see God, who is truth itself, face to face, and are like Him (1 John, iii, 2). Then and not until then we shall cease to dread deception and error; meanwhile it behooves us to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, and to watch and pray, so that no man may rob us of our crown.

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

THE SPIRIT OF THE WORLD

"Jesus answered them and said: Amen, amen, I say to you, you seek me, not because you have seen miracles, but because you did eat of the loaves, and were filled"—John vi, 26.

After our Lord had fed the five thousand in the wilderness, the people displayed great enthusiasm and said: "This is of a truth the prophet that is to come into the world." They even talked of making Him king, intending to use force, in case of His resistance, but Jesus withdrew Himself and fled alone to the mountains, where He passed the night. The next day the excited multitude came to look for Him, for Jesus was then at the height of His popularity. He knew quite well what had kindled all this enthusiasm: "You seek me," He said, "because you did eat of the loaves and were filled." This was the sort of king whom they desired to have, one who could give them all that they needed for their life in this world.

I. Materialism. Was there anything surprising in their desire? Certainly not; many people in every age never give a thought to anything beyond this world. Worldliness displays itself, however, under various forms. Some seriously maintain that the world alone has any real existence, and that all the teaching of Christianity is nonsense, because there is no God; man does not, they say, possess an immortal soul, and so it is absurd to talk about life after death. Why, they ask, should we worry about God, the soul or a future life? We are too sensible to trouble about mere figments of the

imagination; we think only of realities, of what we actually see, hear and taste. We may have to die to-morrow, and then all will be over; we shall go out, and cease to exist, like the flame of a candle that is blown out. The moral deduced from this theory is: Let us eat of the bread and be filled; then we shall be contented, especially if we can eat, drink and sleep in comfort, and have all that conduces to our ease and enjoyment.

This is the lowest form of worldliness, that desires an existence not much above that of a cat or a dog, content to bask before a warm fire, or perhaps of a cow, chewing the cud after she has eaten her fill in a grassy meadow. The animals too might say: "We have eaten and are filled, and therefore we are happy." Just at the present time this form of worldliness is not fashionable, being regarded by some as too coarse, by others as too daring in its assertions regarding God, the soul, and the future life.

II. Positivism. It is considered more correct to say: "We are too modest to arrive at any definite conclusion. Your conception of God is exalted, and we respect it. Your idea of the soul is very beautiful, and we like to picture it as a sort of butterfly with gorgeous wings, hovering above the earth. The theory of there being a life after death appeals to us very much, especially if we may assume that the soul will be happy, that there is no such thing as punishment for sin, and that God is so merciful that He bestows happiness indiscriminately upon all men. Still," they argue, "we *know* nothing at all on these subjects; all your theories are dreams and fancies. There *may* be some truth in them, but it is equally possible that there is none. The conclusion is therefore almost identical with that at which materialists arrive: There is no object in living for God or in thinking about the soul, since we know nothing about them, and it is better to abide by what is certain,

i. e. by this world, and not to trouble about much else. Let us follow our calling, play our part in society, accept temporal advantages and pleasures when they fall to our lot, and do our best to live as honorable and upright men, until the time comes for us to pass into the great All or the great Nothing, to surrender our souls to God, perhaps, but we do not know." This is a fashionable form of worldliness, that proves very attractive to many people.

III. Indifference. Our Lord's followers were not worldly in the sense that we have been discussing. They believed thoroughly in God, the soul, and life after death. To this extent no fault could be found with them; they were quite orthodox in their faith. But this faith had no bearing upon their life; they believed in heaven, but lived for this world; they cared but little for the true bread from heaven, that Jesus offered them, and fixed all their desires on the loaves with which he could feed them in the wilderness. Theirs was the worldliness of indifference; and there are thousands resembling them at the present day; there are thousands who accept all the truths of Christianity, but they never dream of living in accordance with these truths, or, if ever the idea occurs to them, it is when something happens to rouse their emotions, and has no permanence. Yet there are worse forms of worldliness than indifference.

IV. Hypocrisy. At the time of our Lord there were many people who were worldly, although to some extent they lived in accordance with their religious opinions. Unless we *honestly* try to live for God, and to save our souls, all the zeal that we display is hypocritical. There is no worse form of worldliness than that of the hypocrite, and nothing is more hateful to God than hypocrisy, nor is anything more dangerous to ourselves since this kind of worldliness not only looks like fear of the Lord, but often causes

self-deception, so that we are apt to believe ourselves to be indeed God's servants.

V. Conclusion. What opinion ought we to express regarding all these varieties of worldliness? We must acknowledge that none of them "endureth unto life everlasting." Our Lord bids us labor for the meat which endureth, but the world with all its pleasures and honors cannot give us everlasting life; and hence it cannot satisfy us. But how do we know that we are destined to live for ever? Christ, His Apostles and His Church, by the mouth of her priests, doctors and saints, all assure us that this is so; but, besides these, our own consciousness bears testimony to our immortality. If hitherto you have refused to accept the evidence of your own soul, you will with terror realize its truth, when misfortune and death overtake you.

The meat which endureth unto life everlasting comes from heaven, and not from earth. Jesus tells us what it is: "I am the bread of life which cometh down from heaven. Your fathers did eat manna in the desert, and are dead . . . if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever." If you are in earnest about your faith and your desire to live for God, you will learn by experience how completely this bread can satisfy all the cravings of your soul. Countless Saints who have served God faithfully have experienced its efficacy; let us, too, pray like the Jews, though in another sense and with more ardent longing: "Lord, give us always this bread."

PASSION SUNDAY

VIA DOLOROSA

"And he said to them: Doubtless you will say to me this similitude: Physician, heal thyself. As great things as we have heard done in Capharnaum, do also here in thy own country."—Luke iv, 23.

There is in Jerusalem a street known as the Via dolorosa, because Jesus Christ is believed to have carried His cross along it, on His way from Pilate's house to Golgotha. During Passiontide the Church bids us remember particularly the Passion and Death of our Lord; but His whole life on earth was a *Via dolorosa,* a path of suffering. It was through pain that God brought Him to glory. "It became Him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, who had brought many children into glory, to perfect the author of their salvation, by His Passion" (Hebr ii, 10). It is most important therefore for us and all who are friends of Christ to remember that we must follow Him on the path of suffering, so that if we suffer with Him, we may be also glorified with Him (Rom. viii, 17). This is the condition upon which depends our being glorified with Christ; we too must tread the *Via dolorosa,* since otherwise we cannot attain to glory.

I. The Jews were annoyed because Jesus worked no miracles in Nazareth, where His home was situated, and yet did many wonderful works at Capharnaum and elsewhere. Hence in to-day's Gospel we read that He exclaimed: "You will say to me . . . as great things as we have heard done in Capharnaum, do also here in thy own country." He went on to remind the Jews of facts recorded in the Old Testament. When there was a terrible famine in Israel, God sent His prophet to a pagan, not to an Israelite woman, that

she might save him. And although there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Eliseus, none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.

Does God act blindly and arbitrarily? Why did He not show favor to His own people? The answer is simple and obvious: Israel had to atone for its sins, but the pagans found mercy because they believed the Word of God. Capharnaum was permitted to behold God's glory, but Jesus could work no miracles in Nazareth and other places, because of the unbelief of the inhabitants.

Over and over again we find that those who belong to the true Church or who have once really accepted the faith, think that they have a right to enjoy certain privileges, which cannot always be conferred upon them. Thus they cannot invariably be preserved from suffering, and when their hopes are frustrated, they are apt to despond, and it seems to them quite inexplicable that sometimes their chastisement is unusually severe.

II. God does not fail to help His servants in their time of need; nor did Jesus begrudge working miracles in Nazareth. God is not devoid of compassion when you are in sorrow, or blind to your misery, or deaf to your prayers for help. He gives us gladly all that is good for us, otherwise He could not call Himself our Father, or say that He loves us more dearly than a mother loves her babe. If He did not love us, He would not have sent His Son to redeem us. If only you had faith—not the dead faith that does not go beyond mere emotions and meaningless words, but the true, living faith, that manifests itself in love and obedience, you would behold God's glory in your heart, your home, your daily work and trials.

But our Father in Heaven is just, and holiness and justice are His attributes no less than love and mercy. Hence wherever there

is sin, He inflicts punishment, not only on His foes, who believe not in Him, but also on His children who believe.

III. Some people fancy that Christ underwent all the punishment, both temporal and eternal, that was due to our sins. Therefore, God has laid *all* the punishment required by His justice, on One Who was innocent, and has allowed the guilty to go scot free. No human being ought to be liable to any penalty, since Christ suffered for all. But God has so ordered matters that believers alone benefit by Christ's atonement, and hence it follows that all who believe ought to be exempt from all punishment, temporal as well as eternal. Should God inflict any chastisement upon believers, He would be acting like a usurer, who first exacted repayment of a loan from the sureties, and then extorted the same sum over again from his debtor.

If this opinion were correct, and if God remitted all punishment, temporal as well as eternal, for Christ's sake, the faith-healers, who attracted so much attention a few years ago, would have right on their side. They argue thus: If you have faith, you are free from all temporal punishment of sin, all suffering and all disease. A believer cannot be ill, and if sickness attacks him, it is a sign that he is deficient in faith; therefore if he can but have faith enough, he will be cured forthwith. If the faithhealers fail to effect a cure, the blame rests not with them, but with the sick person, who either cannot or will not believe. All who believe have a right to be spared sickness and every kind of temporal suffering, and so if any malady assails them, God is bound to deliver them from it, either by natural or by miraculous means; and therefore the professional healers consider themselves commissioned to perform such miracles.

If this theory were correct, and a logical deduction were drawn from these arguments, a fanatical sect, that originated some years

ago, would also be in the right. They went so far as to maintain that a believer could not die, but must be exempt from bodily death, since Christ died for him, and God does not impose the death penalty twice. Whenever any member of the sect died, the survivors were much astonished, and could only assume that they had been mistaken in supposing him to be a believer.

Some estimable people tell us that their sense of justice is outraged by the idea that God has laid the chastisement for sin upon the innocent, in such a way as to release the guilty from at least everlasting punishment due to it. If such men are not taught the true doctrine on this subject, they are likely to lose their faith and abandon Christianity, and thus the Church is deprived of honest but unenlightened souls, who might have been her loyal supporters, had they been better instructed.

IV. How can we account for the sufferings that overtake God's children in this world? Those who do not accept the teaching of the Church, answer this question in many different ways. Some say that God allowed our Saviour to pay the whole penalty, in order to deliver us from all punishment, including the temporal. But, seeing discipline to be good for us, He lets us suffer just as though He regarded us as guilty, whereas for Christ's sake He looks upon us as perfectly innocent. This line of thought seems to involve a strange inconsistency. Suppose a father were to say to his son: "You have behaved well, and I have no fault to find with you, but I think a whipping might do you good." Might not the boy who was flogged have ground for complaint? If God has renounced all right to punish us, because Christ has made atonement, He has surely no right to inflict suffering upon those who believe in Him. On these lines the sorrows of the faithful become quite inexplicable, and altogether irreconcilable with their redemp-

tion in Christ. It is a real misfortune when no explanation of suffering is forthcoming, for it is very hard to bear a cross for which no account can be given, and which seems out of keeping with God's love. In this way the problem of the cross is as obscure for us, as it was for Job. What is its solution?

Experience shows us that God allows His faithful children to suffer in this world, and inflicts temporal chastisement upon them. The Saints often endured great trials, so it must be quite a mistake to suppose that all suffering was laid upon our Saviour in order that we should go scot free, and escape even temporal punishment. The Church has always taught that, in God's design, Christ's redemption was intended to deliver us from the eternal, but not from all the temporal punishment due to our sins. The latter we have to endure as a just chastisement, and as a penance, which affords us an opportunity of satisfying God's justice during our earthly life. At the same time the sorrows of this world serve to teach us humility, obedience and patience. This belief gives us peace of mind, and courage to bear our cross, and the cross ceases to be inexplicable. If we bear it with humility, patience and resignation, it will sanctify, purify and strengthen us, as nothing else can do. Hence all who really believe, are eager to tread the way of the Cross, and the *Via dolorosa* is found to be strewn with blessings.

PALM SUNDAY

A TWO-FOLD HOSANNA

"The multitudes that went before and that followed, cried, saying: Hosanna to the Son of David; blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord, Hosanna in the highest."—Matt. xxi, 9.

At first sight there seems something incongruous about hosanna in Lent, during the season of penance; but we must remember that there is a two-fold hosanna, and that there are two ways in which Christ comes in the name of the Lord. His friends should welcome Him each time with the cry: "Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord."

I. In lowliness. St. Paul, speaking of Christ's humiliation, says that He took "the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of man . . . He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross" (Phil. ii, 7, 8). His humiliation consisted in renunciation of the full use of His divine and human rights. In to-day's Gospel we read that when He was about to enter Jerusalem with His followers, He borrowed an ass, and in the absence of a saddle some garments were laid on the creature's back. The whole triumphal procession was, as He well knew, the first stage on His road to death, even the death of the Cross, for our sins.

He comes therefore in the name of the Lord, and we behold Him in His beauty and recognize Him as the Lamb of God, ready to take away the sins of the world, and so we greet Him with the words: "Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord."

But is not His humiliation over? Yes; He is personally glorified; yet in his dealings with us He often displays His lowliness. We see that His kingdom is not of this world, and possesses no outward splendor. His word reaches us from the lips of obscure human beings, and it is still obscure, it still makes great demands upon our faith, whilst its apparent contradictions call for humble and submissive acceptation on our part. Even Christ's Sacraments are outwardly human actions, devoid of all pomp that would render them attractive in the eyes of the world, and so many people despise instead of honoring them.

It behooves us to welcome our Lord with faith, humility and obedience, and then a song of praise will rise involuntarily from our hearts and find utterance on our lips. If we receive Him otherwise, He will care nothing for our praise. It is in His power to overwhelm us with the brilliancy of His heaven-born splendor, and to compel us to adore Him, as He did for a moment in the Garden of Gethsemani, when the soldiers came to arrest Him. He might use the irresistible force of His divinity to exact our homage, and to silence those who despise Him. But He does none of these things, for He wishes to win our hearts, and so He comes with a light that fails to dazzle, although it suffices to guide those who frankly seek the truth. Our Lord requires us to choose Him freely in humility and obedience, for it is false to say that we possess no free will. It is as essential for creatures endowed with the moral sense now as it was in Paradise. If there were no free will, the prophet Osee could not truthfully assert: "Destruction is thy own, O Israel" (xiii, 19), for God would be to blame for our destruction, and would have no right to reproach us. But whilst it is undoubtedly true that we alone are answerable for our own destruction, it is no less true that our salvation comes from God, Who, by

His grace, stimulates, supports and strengthens our free will. If we avail ourselves rightly of our freedom and His help, our outpourings of praise will be spontaneous.

How can we praise God in the right way? The shouts of the multitude at Christ's entry into Jerusalem meant nothing more than such shouts frequently mean; they express merely a momentary enthusiasm roused by superficial excitement. The people are easily moved when anything impresses them by its greatness, beauty or pathos; each individual communicates his feelings to his neighbors, and the result is a universal outcry, although many perhaps hardly know why they are shouting. This fact accounts for the sudden change from the hosanna of Palm Sunday to the savage yells of "Crucify Him, Crucify Him."

If we desire to praise God aright, we must not lay too much stress upon feelings of excitement and tears of emotion, which are so uncertain that they readily veer round into the opposite direction. The Jews on Palm Sunday showed their respect for our Lord by spreading their garments before Him; we can do still better. If we are clothed with the garments of pride, vanity and selfishness, let us strip them off for His sake. This sacrifice will please Him more than clothes spread on the road and shouts of hosanna, for there is less danger of its being prompted merely by a fleeting emotion; moreover it costs us more, and does Him greater honor. The Jews cut down branches from the trees and strewed them in the way. We can lop off the evil growths that disfigure our inward and outward life, the sinful inclinations and passions, the effeminate habits and worldly amusements that are like parasites, destroying our vitality. We can cut them down, cost what it may; the most painful sacrifices are the most precious and in these respects Christ demands not a little, for He says: "If thine eyes

scandalize thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee . . . if they hand scandalize thee, cut it off and cast it from thee." To make sacrifices for Christ is to offer Him the form of homage that He values most highly. Feelings and words are shortlived and untrustworthy, and our Lord cares more for the homage paid by the will and mode of life. We have to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, bringing to bear upon the task all our will and all our faculties, so that our daily life may be transformed into the service of God, and this is a song of praise, more pleasing to Him than any other.

II. In glory. Our Lord's humiliation is followed by His exaltation, which consists in His resuming His divine and human prerogatives, and thus entering into His glory at the right hand of the Father. Sometimes we see rays of His glory penetrating the obscurity of His lowliness, and this is the case in to-day's Gospel. He knew beforehand what His messengers would encounter in Jerusalem; He knew that the owner of the ass would at once lend the animal, on hearing that the Lord had need of it. He realized that the prophecy was being fulfilled when He, the true King of Sion, accepted the homage of His people. Yet it is in the epistle that we hear most of His glory: "God hath exalted Him, and hath given Him a name which is above all names; that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those that are in heaven, on earth, and under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that the Lord Jesus Christ is in the glory of God the Father" (Phil. ii, 9-11).

Those who extol Him in His glory are those who honored Him in His humiliation; it is impossible to despise Him in His lowliness and praise Him in His glory; although many behave as if they could act thus. No one can rejoice with our glorified Saviour, who has not been His friend and companion in humiliation. We have

already considered whether it is still possible to praise our Lord in His lowliness, now that He has entered into His glory. We have now to ask whether we can praise Him in His glory before we ourselves are admitted to share it.

No doubt we can do so, in as far as we can already perceive some faint glimmer of His Majesty. St. Paul speaks of something that God has revealed to us, His children, even in this world, although "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man" (1 Cor. ii, 9). Every Christian experiences it to some extent, though he may not enjoy such a revelation as was granted to the Apostle. We must, as a rule, be contented with the faint reflection of glory which reaches us here below; it is of this that St. John speaks when he says: "The Word was made Flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, the glory as it were of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John i, 14). This alone ought to satisfy us, and make us exclaim. "Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord."

III. Homage from all. When our Saviour comes in glory to judge both the living and the dead, all will have to bend the knee before Him; that is to say, all, willingly or unwillingly, must adore Him, for He demands the worship of the whole human race and of all creation. "Every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them; I heard all saying: To Him that sitteth on the throne and to the Lamb, benediction and honor and glory and power for ever and ever" (Apoc. v, 13). If you have hitherto not learned how to praise Him, or if your praise has been hypocritical lipservice and not heartfelt adoration, be converted, whilst there is yet time. Look at your heart, deeply stained with sin, and then contemplate His Heart, abounding in mercy. The more profoundly you realize the

sinfulness of your own heart, the more freely will mercy and grace flow from His most Sacred Heart. The more intense your sorrow for sin here, the louder will be your song of rejoicing hereafter, when you are permitted to greet Him with the words: "Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord."

EASTER SUNDAY

"WITH FEAR AND GREAT JOY"

"The angel answering said to the women: Fear not you, for I know that you seek Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here, for He is risen, as He said: Come and see the place where the Lord was laid."—Matt. xxviii, 5, 6.

The evangelist tells us that the women went out from the sepulchre with fear and great joy, running to tell our Lord's disciples that He had risen from the dead. If we consider these two emotions, fear and joy, we shall find that they dominate our whole life here on earth.

I. It is obvious that all creatures feel fear. I often feed the birds on my windowsill, and watch them as they eat. They never pick up a crumb without a hasty glance round to see if any danger threatens them. It makes me sad sometimes to watch them, for they are so timid. If I go for a walk in the woods, I enjoy the cool shade, the aromatic fragrance of the trees, the song of the birds and the movements of innumerable little animals; but as soon as I try to approach any of the woodland creatures, they disappear; they seem to live in a state of perpetual alarm. May we not say the same of human existence? We feel even greater fear, because we realize greater dangers, and every man knows that he is a responsible agent, and is conscious of his shortcomings. Although he may not recognize the reason of his fear, he dreads involuntarily the judgment that awaits all sinners. He knows that death is inevitable, and no enjoyment, however intense, can remove his fear of it; in fact this fear often embitters his happiest moments.

No human life is free from fear of this sort, least of all a worldly,

self-indulgent existence, for there is no escape from the judgment to come, when an account will have to be rendered. It is an undeniable fact that an unworthy and useless life is a life of fear; but perhaps some will venture to challenge my statement, if I declare it to be also a joyless existence. I shall certainly be charged with exaggeration, but there may be a variety of opinions as to what constitutes happiness, and probably everyone will finally admit that such a life is devoid of *true* joy. The result is the same; a joy that is not true, is really not joy at all; and therefore I affirm that a worldly, unprofitable life is devoid of true happiness. Of course a worldly-minded man finds pleasure in all sorts of things, such as eating, drinking, sleeping, good health, sensual gratification, a good reputation, etc. But do these constitute true happiness? No; happiness that consists of transitory enjoyment, whether intellectual or sensual, is not true happiness at all. To be true, it must possess some degree of permanence, and be to some extent independent of accidental changes. Now a worldly man never experiences happiness of this kind, and therefore we may safely assert that his life is devoid of true joy.

II. The life of every Christian is tinged with fear and joy. It is a dangerous mistake to describe the earthly existence of Christ's followers as full of joy, and to ignore the presence of fear. This mistake leads to painful results, since, whenever fear is felt, a consciousness of disappointment may plunge a man into unbelief or even into despair. It is through fear—the fear inseparable from a sense of one's own sinfulness, that we attain to the true happiness of Christianity. Fear and joy belong to the very essence of the Christian life, but they do so in a greater or less degree.

III. In many cases a Christian experiences much fear and little joy, and there are some who seem always overshadowed by dread.

This may be due to natural melancholy, to an innate disposition to look on the dark side of things, and to discover everywhere ground for uneasiness and anxiety. It may proceed from the remembrances of past sins, of wasted opportunities and wrong-doing. If people of this kind were not Christians, they would be very apt to despair; but in their religion they possess the source of a certain amount of happiness, that is true and permanent, and so they are enabled to persevere, for they feel, deep in their hearts, the germ of what will eventually be exultant gladness. I think that there are many Christians of this kind; they are thankful for the scant measure of joy that they possess, but they are weighed down with sadness, and look out on life with eyes dim with tears; they walk in much fear, and very little happiness.

IV. There are others whose life is an alternation of intense fear and intense joy. They realize their shortcomings, they perceive clearly the dangers and difficulties threatening both them and the Church, and they are filled with sorrow and alarm. Yet at the same time they welcome every encouragement and reason for rejoicing, and thus they are better able bodily to encounter perils. They live in much fear and much happiness.

V. Finally there are some who abound in joy, though it is not wholly free from all admixture of fear. The Apostle's advice to work out our salvation with fear and trembling is addressed to all Christians, yet not in the same degree. Some fortunate mortals live either by nature or by grace, or by both in conjunction, so peaceful and calm a life, that in their case joy overpowers fear. This is not invariably a mark of the highest perfection, for such quiet, contented souls may be liable to a kind of superficiality and spiritual shortsightedness, but, on the other hand, their lives may be exceptionally smooth, happy and harmonious.

VI. In all the three classes of Christians that we have been considering, fear and joy are seen to be inseparable in this life. Therefore those who are cheerful should rejoice, but at the same time they must be careful not to forget to work out their salvation with fear and trembling. Those who are sad should bear in mind the Apostle's exhortation to rejoice in the Lord always. They must cherish the germ of happiness which God has implanted in the depths of their souls.

VII. There is, however, a life devoid of fear and abounding in joy, but it is enjoyed only by those who have finished their course, and whose sorrows are forgotten in God's undying love. We ought not to expect such bliss here below, but we may look forward to it in the glory of heaven.

VIII. This life being full of fear and alarm, it is not surprising that many a Christian is inclined to ask how he can overcome these feelings. Remember the words addressed by the angel to the women at the sepulchre: "Fear not you, for I know that you seek Jesus Who was Crucified." There is an old saying which has often consoled me in times of despondency: "He worketh not in vain, who laboreth for God." This harmonizes with the angel's "Fear not." . . . If our anxieties are really due to our eagerness to find Jesus, if our labor is really an effort to know and recognize His truth—then to what troubles us is attached the promise that we shall find Him and see Him as He is, and find in Him joy everlasting. If we seek Jesus Who was crucified, we need never fear, as those do, who have no hope. He that seeketh, findeth. Our Divine Saviour did not remain dead, but rose again from the dead. He is risen indeed. The women beheld their risen Lord, as did the Apostles, with whom He tarried forty days, so that more than five hundred of the brethren saw Him after His resurrection. His

disciples bore joyful testimony to His resurrection, and gladly died as martyrs rather than deny this truth. Their unanimous testimony is the source of joy to us, for since Christ rose from the dead, He has destroyed the dominion of death over us, for whom He died. Hence we perceive a light beyond the grave, and the dawn of eternity is for us the entrance into everlasting happiness.

LOW SUNDAY

PEACE BE TO YOU

"Now when it was late that same day, the first of the week, and the doors were shut, where the disciples were gathered together for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them: 'Peace be to you.'"—John xx, 19.

We read in to-day's Gospel that our Saviour greeted His disciples twice with the words: "Peace be to you" and He offers us the same greeting. Peace is a precious treasure, and the whole happiness of Christianity may be summed up in the one idea of peace. A man may possess all that his heart can desire, but if he is not at peace, he is not happy. On the other hand, however, no one is miserable, though he may be in abject poverty, who enjoys peace of mind; he is, in spite of all things, truly happy. There is only one kind of peace that bestows such happiness—peace with God through Jesus Christ. When through His Church our Lord greets us with words of peace, His greeting is not the mere expression of a wish, but it actually confers the gift. When He commissions His servants to say *Pax vobiscum,* or *Pax huic domui,* He intends not only to wish peace to exist, but also to impart it. His words are full of grace and power, if we are willing to accept them. Our Saviour's gift of peace should strengthen us to resist human respect, discouragement and doubts. .

I. Human respect. On the evening of the first Easter day the disciples were gathered together, a timid company, sitting with the doors shut for fear of the Jews. This was quite natural, for everyone was against them, and they were in sore need of help. Their Master had been taken from them and they knew not whither to

turn, when suddenly they saw Him standing in their midst. Their fear and despondency vanished, for their Lord was once more with them, pouring His peace into their hearts. "The disciples therefore were glad when they saw the Lord." Since then the same thing has happened again and again. How often has a little group of followers of Christ sought concealment from the hatred and persecution of the world! Even at the present day Christians have to fear open ill-treatment and active hostility, as well as uncharitable judgments, calumnies and intolerance. They are apt to lose their peace of mind; but the true disciples of Jesus can always recover it, especially if they assemble in His Name within His Church. There He is in their midst, ready to give the graces that they need, and also to bestow that peace which sinks deep into the heart, sanctifying the life and strengthening the mind of each person present. This peace proceeds from the joyful consciousness that Christ is in their midst, and so, as of old, the disciples of Jesus rejoice in the certainty that their Lord is with them. They realize that men have never prevailed against God and His Church, however intense their hatred and fury may have been. The knowledge of this fact caused St. Justin, one of the earliest martyrs in the age of persecution, to utter the proudest defiance ever hurled by a Christian against the enemies of the Church: "You may kill us, but you cannot injure us."

II. Discouragement. After saying to His disciples "Peace be to you," our Lord continued: "As the Father hath sent Me, I also send you," and He went on to give them authority to forgive and to retain sins, thus assigning to them their official position in His Church. Peace was to be with them, as a pledge of strength in spite of weakness.

When we consider our own poverty in good works, we are very apt to be discouraged; and sometimes, when we seem to have toiled

altogether in vain, we feel inclined to despair. Our conscience too often accuses us, and all our efforts seem to end in failure. The world tries to quiet the voice of conscience by pleading: "I did my best," but in most cases this is utterly untrue; we have not done our best, and we have no right to flatter ourselves with such an excuse. A Christian labors with fear and trembling for others as well as for himself, and frequently he is overwhelmed by a sense of depression. What is he to do? We are much better off than the disciples who, believing that their Lord had left them completely alone, hid in fear of the Jews. We know that He has not abandoned us; we know where to find Him, really present as God and Man, in the tabernacle of every Catholic Church. We ought to gather round Him there, eager to adore and to receive Him, and in this Bethel we shall realize that "the Lord is in this place." Here we shall listen to His greeting, that brings to His followers peace, gladness and strength to overcome all their weakness. Sometimes peace will be given us abundantly, sometimes we may be painfully aware that we are not at peace, since from time to time it is good for us to be humbled, and to fear. Under all circumstances, however, it behooves us to remember that peace is to be found in faith, and not in sight. If we never forget this truth, we should not so frequently complain of trouble of mind.

III. Doubts. St. Thomas doubted. He was not present when the other disciples beheld their Lord on the evening of Easter Sunday, but he was with them when, a week later, Christ again stood in their midst, saying: "Peace be to you." We are not told in the Gospel that Thomas really put his finger into the prints of the nails in our Lord's hands, but we may probably assume that his doubts were overcome partly by the evidence of his own senses, but still more by the influence of his Master's greeting and words of

peace. Previously he had been harassed by doubt and uncertainty, but then he was in the presence of One able to pour peace into his troubled mind. Convinced that he was indeed standing before his risen Saviour, he exclaimed involuntarily: "My Lord and my God!"

In God alone can the human heart find peace; "He is my God and my salvation" (Ps. lxi, 3). He gives the peace of which St. Paul says that it surpasseth all understanding (Phil. iv, 7). Such peace is like the sun's light shining into the soul whilst worldly men are in the gloomy darkness of despair. Our faith derives fresh strength from this peace, when we are assailed by doubts, although as a rule, faith is the stronghold of peace. "Being justified by faith, let us have peace with God" (Rom. v, 1), says the Apostle, and it is only natural that this should be the case, for where else could peace be found? But when faith is inclined to waver, it sometimes is sustained by the power of peace. A man may be tortured by doubts without having entirely renounced Christianity; he may be struggling in vain for light, yet his darkness increases rather than diminishes, rendering the soul anxious and weary. But although he is on the point of losing courage, he may "against hope believe in hope" (Rom. iv, 18), and resign himself completely to God, seeking Him in the Sacraments, which are the ordinary channels of grace; and then it may come to pass that peace will descend upon his suffering soul, and be the blessed instrument of preserving his faith. Then will he exclaim joyfully, like St. Thomas, "My Lord and my God," for he will have recovered his faith, through the peace that God alone can bestow.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

"I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd giveth his life for his sheep." —John x, 11.

St. Paul, in writing to the Corinthians, says: "By manifestation of the truth we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God" (2 Cor. iv, 2). The lofty morality inculcated by Christianity commends itself to the conscience and intellect of every individual, and this must inevitably be the case, since no other moral code is as pure, nor does any other agree so perfectly with what our conscience, our own inward judge, tells us to be right. At the present day there are many moral systems unconnected with religion, but they are all devoid of the one thing necessary to give them a firm foundation, and it is precisely the religious element in the moral code of Christianity that commends it to our understanding. In to-day's Gospel we are reminded of Christ as the Good Shepherd, giving His life for His sheep; let us consider this truth in its relation to the requirements of our religious consciousness and reason.

1. *The Good Shepherd giveth His life for His sheep.* Christ is the Good Shepherd because He laid down His life for us, because He loved us with intense love, for "greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John xv, 13). Love involves self-devotion, which reaches its climax when a man dies for one whom he loves. Others indeed have died for their friends, but not in the sense in which Christ died for us. His self-devotion was unparalleled, for no one in the world could ever do what He did, and only from the Gospel can we learn the extent of

His sacrifice. We are taught that He died for us, in the sense of dying in our stead, since, but for His death, we must inevitably have perished eternally. His death was a sacrifice offered in atonement for our sins and the sins of the whole world. If the doctrine of the atonement is eliminated from the Gospel, it at once ceases to be for us the glad tidings of salvation; it is precisely because it contains this doctrine, that the Gospel commends itself to the human conscience. To many it seems a hard saying that the innocent should die for the guilty; some reject the doctrine and ridicule it, others adhere to the letter of the Gospel, but assign to the words another meaning, different from that which they obviously bear. Such people tell us that Christ gave up His life as a pledge of God's immediate and direct love of sinners, and that we are mistaken in supposing Him to be filled with holy anger against them. Unless our Saviour had suffered the penalty of sin for us, He would not really have effected our reconciliation with God. If there is one thing more than another that corresponds with the universal religious consciousness of men, it is the evangelical teaching on the subject of the atonement. "Without shedding of blood there is no remission" (Heb. ix, 22). This idea is impressed indelibly in the hearts of men in every age, and the thought of an atoning sacrifice is fundamental in every religion. Among pagan nations it was the custom to sacrifice not only the produce of their fields and their domestic animals, but even their slaves and their own children. The very suggestion of such things makes us shudder, but they afford a striking testimony to the universal need felt by the human conscience. They show how men were blindly groping after what the Gospel revealed fully, viz.: after the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world, Jesus Christ our Redeemer. Men honored Him, though they knew Him not, and the manner in which

our Christian doctrine of the atonement commends itself to the minds of men is a very remarkable evidence of its truth. Jesus Christ gave up His life, but, as He said, He had power to take it again, and He used this power when He rose from the dead. He did not only lay down His life once for all for our sake, but He is continually bestowing it upon us, and thus is nourishing us for eternal life. Hence He is the Good Shepherd, with whom none other can be compared, for no other shepherd can nourish his sheep with his own life. The pelican which, tradition tells us, feeds its young with its own blood, and the mother, who suckles her infant at her breast, are but faint types of Christ in His dealings with His people. St. Paul describes the marvellously intimate relation existing between the Good Shepherd and His flock, and our Lord Himself speaks of it in the parables of the body and its members, and of the vine and its branches. St. Paul uses an expression that, without his sanction, we should hardly dare to employ, for he says: "He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit" (1 Cor. vi, 17). St. Peter speaks of our being partakers in the divine nature (2 Peter i, 4); and Christ Himself compares His connection with us with the relation existing between Himself and His heavenly Father (John xvii, 21).

2. *The Good Shepherd knoweth His own sheep.* Another reason why Jesus Christ is the Good Shepherd is that He knoweth His own sheep. Every one of us, at some time or other, must have felt a craving to be known, a longing for a friend whose piercing eye can fathom the very depths of his nature. We try to satisfy this craving by forming human friendships, and occasionally we are successful, but never as completely successful as we desire. With the best intentions we are incapable of revealing our innermost being to any mortal eye, nor have our friends such clear and true insight into our character as never to grieve us by their lack of compre-

hension. Sometimes we suffer bitterly from breach of confidence on their part, and we find those whom we have loved and trusted are ready to betray us. This experience has broken many a heart.

The Gospel shows us Christ as one who knows us thoroughly and never misunderstands us, never abuses His knowledge, but uses it in giving us what we need; thus acting like the Good Shepherd, who leads his sheep to the best pasture. He gives us what makes for peace, and He possesses the power and the love that enable Him to do this. This thought is full of consolation for us all.

We are speaking of a deep religious need, common to all men. If we are to believe in a God and Saviour and have confidence in Him, He must be one "who knoweth His own sheep."

3. *The Good Shepherd is known by His sheep.* They recognize His voice, approach Him with confidence and follow Him fearlessly. We hear our Lord's voice in the Gospel and in the Church, since He said to His apostles: "He that heareth you, heareth me" (Luke x, 16). In this way we learn to know God, and are not left to have recourse to some "unknown God," when we wish to give expression to our religious needs. We know God through His Son, who is the revelation of the Father. "He that seeth me, seeth the Father also" (John xiv, 9).

4. *The Good Shepherd gathereth His sheep together.* The sheepfold is the Church of Christ, into which He gathers His sheep. We all are more or less aware of a desire for union and social life; and we are by nature designed to live in society, but we are truly united with one another only when we are united in and with God, and our social instincts are satisfied only in His Church, in which is restored the intercourse with God that was interrupted by sin. Some people imagine that the state can supply all that we require, and represent the Kingdom of God on earth, since they assume its function to be

the development and perfection of human life in all its relations and organization. By its very nature, however, the state is incapable of satisfying men's social instincts on the most important points. The state is indeed a society ordered in accordance with law and justice, and as such it is an institution designed by God, so that the servants of the state may be called "the ministers of God" (Rom. xiii, 6). But it is essentially an organization the aim and object of which is limited to this life. It exists in and for this world, and therefore it is incapable of providing us with what we especially need. It is a national institution. A man is a member of a state, not as a human being, but as belonging to some particular nation, distinct in language, modes of thought and customs from other nations. There is no common interest to bind together men of different nationalities, and prevent their natural idiosyncrasies from developing into grounds of hostility. The state can never overcome our innate selfishness, which makes for discord. The state is therefore a national society, and in the Church alone is there a universal society. She is Catholic, universal, in the highest and fullest sense. She posesses in faith, hope and charity a unity that is independent of all local and national limitations. The state controls the social life of men in this world, and does so chiefly by means of law, so that the law has been called the "soul of the state." It uses compulsion to secure obedience to law, and consequently it is the principle of power that guarantees the existence of the state. The task of the Church is to unite men with God. She cannot attain this end by applying external compulsion, and consequently her dominion is based essentially upon the principle of liberty—she is a free society. This does not mean that she claims no authority at all, but that her authority is of another kind than that of the state. Her prestige is unrivalled; she exerts however not the right of power, but the

power of right; that is to say, she claims a right superior to that of any other authority, since she alone is commissioned to guard and teach revealed truth. "If a man will not hear the Church, let him be to thee as the heathen and publican" (Matt. xviii, 17). She appeals to each man's conscience and demands his voluntary obedience. She relies not on his fear of compulsion, but on his sense of duty and on his recognition of her divine authority. Thus, even apart from the explicit promises of her Founder, she has a totally different guarantee for her existence from that possessed by any other society. Every other community rests on foundations liable to be destroyed, but conscience cannot be destroyed. Hence every other community is, in comparison with the Church, temporary and changeable; she alone is permanent and unchanging.

To sum up: Jesus Christ is the Good Shepherd, who gathers us all together into one flock that we may have life eternal—this flock is the Church, in which our natural desire for union is gratified. It is plain, therefore, that from every point of view the teaching of the Gospel commends itself to the conscience of each individual.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

FEAR AND CONSOLATION

"Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in me."—John xiv, 1.

Many years ago I made a tour in the mountains with a friend, and one afternoon we set out to walk from one cowherd's cottage to another.

We had been told that there were signposts along the path, so that we felt no uneasiness. After a while, however, it struck us that the distance seemed much greater than we had expected, and suddenly we realised that we had lost our way. We knew not in which direction to turn, for we had neither map nor compass, and could see nothing but barren mountains, stretching for miles all around us. Dark clouds and occasional flashes of lightning heralded the approach of a heavy storm; the day light was waning, and we had nothing to eat. What were we to do? Should we wander on or stay where we were? Both proposals seemed equally hazardous, and I felt terror then, as never before in my whole life. Happily before long we met a man who put us on the right path, and all ended well.

1. This story may serve to give us some faint idea of the alarm felt by our Lord's disciples at the prospect of losing their Master, and being left alone, without a guide, in the wilderness of this world. Similar alarm must be felt by every man, who has no trustworthy guide, when he is brought face to face with the questions: "Whence did I come?" "Whither am I going?" "What is my goal?" "Which path must I follow in order to reach this goal?" It would be well

for the careless and indifferent to experience this sense of fear; then perhaps they would listen to Christ's comforting words: "I am the Way." Notice how our Lord did not speak of Himself as the guide, but as the way. He did not merely point out the road, or set us an example, as rationalists suggest. It was not enough for us to know something about the way, and to have an example to follow—that was too high for us, and we needed something more. Jesus Christ is not only our Teacher, He is also our Shepherd, lifting the poor lost sheep in His arms and bearing it back to the sheepfold.

What did He mean by calling Himself the way? He meant that we were to be one with Him, united to Him in His living personality, so that His spirit should be our spirit, and His life our life. Especially were we to become one with Him in the most holy Sacrament of His Body and Blood. If we are united with Him, His way will be our way, and, walking with Him, we shall reach home at last. This doctrine is full of consolation for His disciples, when they are overcome with fear in the wilderness of this world, and are at a loss whither to direct their steps.

2. The world is not simply a pathless wilderness, but it abounds in traps and snares, and those who fall into them are doomed to destruction. We ask in bewilderment: "What is truth?" and receive all kinds of contradictory answers. We stand, as it were, on a moor across which run innumerable tracks, and we know not which to follow, yet our salvation depends upon our choosing the right path. At last we meet One who says, not this or that is the truth, but simply: I am the Truth. He does not merely bear witness to the truth, but He is the Truth, and we attain to it only by being united with Him. Here is comfort for the anxious, here our hearts find peace such as the world can never give. We learn by

happy experience that He alone is the truth, in Him alone are peace and consolation. Even amongst those who call themselves Christians there exists a terrible indifference to the truth, which is often scorned and ridiculed, not only by professed unbelievers, but also by those professing to proclaim the truth regarding God. They sneer at the great and glorious work accomplished by the Church in every age and at her efforts, directed by the Holy Ghost, to present the truths of Christianity in as clear a form as possible. Her work is indeed indispensable, but they think that we need no dogmatic teaching to enable us to avoid the strife of parties and sects, which are always at variance concerning the truth, like a kingdom divided against itself. Sooner or later all these teachers arrive at the same conclusion, viz.: that each individual is saved in virtue of whatever faith he possesses. Thus the truth of Christ is trampled under foot by men who claim to honor it themselves and to uphold it as an object of reverence to others.

3. But if, as children of the Church, we know the way and recognize the truth, this is not all that is required of us. It is one thing to know the way leading to life, and another to live. All around us we see signs of death rather than of life. Our loved ones die, and we ourselves must die too. The world is like a vast cemetery, and wherever we go, we are treading on graves. The thought of death often weighs us down, and even if we can face with composure the death of the body, it is impossible to contemplate calmly the death of the soul in a state of sin. We know the way of life, and yet many thousands die in sin, estranged from God. Is this not a terrible thought? Can we find anywhere ground for consolation? Jesus Christ said: I am the Life. He means by these words: "Be united with Me in faith and charity, and then you will not only *know* the way leading to life, but you will actually

be on the path, and will have within you the beginning of life eternal." This is a great consolation for a Christian, and experience proves it to be true. Not long ago we kept the feast of St. Catharine of Siena, who was so wise and so holy that no one left her company without becoming better. If this can be said with truth of a mere human being, it is far more true of Him who is at once Son of God and Son of Man, for He is the life, the holy, divine life, that overcomes all death. This is the joyful experience of Christians, who know that the more closely they cling to Him, and the more thoroughly they are united with Him in faith and charity by means of His holy word and the most holy Sacrament, so much the more complete is the triumph within them of life over the powers of sin, the flesh and death. This is their chief consolation, when they dread the dominion of death in the world.

Yet even here is something that fills me with alarm. It is the cold indifference displayed by many Christians to the life of the soul; I mean the holy life that consists of love, obedience and self-denial. They have some kind of faith, and desire forgiveness of their sins, but their love is cold, they are unwilling to obey or to deny themselves in order to attain to sanctity of life. Our Lord said: "He that keepeth my commandments, he it is that loveth Me." Therefore, if we do not keep His commandments, we do not love Him, and there is no life in us. How fearful it is to fancy oneself alive whereas one is really dead in sin!

4. We have seen that there is much comfort for all who love our Lord; but this comfort will be perfect only in eternity. Eliezer, the faithful servant, said to Rebecca at the well: "Is there room in thy father's house for me to lodge in?" and she replied in the affirmative (Gen. xxiv, 23, 25). So Christ tells us that in His Father's house are many mansions. There is room for all the vast multi-

tude of the righteous and for myriads of angels, and there will be room for you, too, when you depart hence, weary with the long and toilsome journey. There is room for those who find no home on earth; room for the outcast and downtrodden; room for all who look towards heaven with faith and love. When the Arian governor asked St. Basil whither he could go, if he were persecuted both on land and sea, the saint replied: "Either under heaven or into heaven";—under heaven in hope, into heaven in rapturous contemplation. Our place awaits us, for our Lord promised to prepare it for us. And not only is our home ready, but our heavenly Father is there to welcome us, and Christ is there, and all our friends who have passed away before us. Is it not pure joy to think of our welcome home? Christ promised to come again and take us to Himself. He will entrust our parting souls to His holy angels, who carried Lazarus into Abraham's bosom. Our friends will greet us at heaven's gate, and lead us into our everlasting dwelling. Praised be Jesus Christ for giving us the comfort of life in this world of death!

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

OUR LORD'S PRAYER FOR HIS DISCIPLES

"I pray for them; I pray not for the world, but for them whom thou hast given me, because they are thine."—John xvii, 9.

1. A young man is leaving his home to carry on his studies in some distant town. His mother stands at the door and watches him go. He turns round and sees her make the Sign of the Cross over him, before he passes out of sight; he knows too that she will then go to her room and pour out her heart in earnest prayer for him, and that she will do this every day, so that he will always have the support of his mother's prayers. They will win for him comfort and strength amidst the perils of the life that lies before him. When St. Monica prayed anxiously for her son, St. Augustine, some one assured her that the child of so many prayers could not be lost. It is indeed good for a man to know that his mother prays for him. We all have advocates in heaven. If the saints in glory did not pray for their brethren on earth, there would be no true communion between God's children here and above, and the Church here and the Church above would not be one and the same. The saints in heaven intercede for the Church—this is a truth that appeals to every Catholic, and is acknowledged even by our separated brethren. It is a consoling and encouraging truth; for if the prayers of earthly advocates are precious, how much more precious must be those of the saints in glory, who understand, far better than we do, how we ought to pray! Most precious of all is the intercession made by Jesus Christ on our behalf. We learn from today's Gospel a little about it, since He prayed on earth for His disciples, and continues

to do so in heaven. "He makes intercession for transgressors" (Is. liii, 12). He is at the right hand of God, and maketh intercession for us (Rom. viii, 34). He is always living to make intercession for us (Hebr. vii, 25). If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the just (1 John ii, 1). Thus His disciples are sustained through life by His intercession, and this is so overpowering a thought that, if it once is firmly grasped and brought to bear upon our lives, it is enough to remove all despondency and to banish all fear. We may learn from our Lord's intercession what ought particularly to be the object of our prayer.

2. *What our Lord did not ask for His disciples.* He tells us Himself that He did not ask that they should be taken out of the world. They would have desired to follow Him, and there seemed good reason for this wish. The world was so powerful, and they were so weak. The world hated them, and the impending struggle threatened to be so hard that victory was well-nigh impossible. How could they be sure that they would remain faithful to the end? Would it not be better for their Master to secure their salvation at once?

No, such a prayer would not be granted, for they were not yet ready to die. They had to pass through great tribulation before they attained perfection, and moreover our Lord needed them to assist in founding His kingdom on earth, so He did not pray that God might take them out of the world. Christ has had many disciples who have grown weary in the conflict, and, despairing of success, have broken down under the burden of suffering; in their dread of the future they have, like the prophet Elias, longed for death, saying: "It is enough, O Lord, take away my life" (3 Kings xix, 4). When we are tempted to utter this prayer, we should ask ourselves: "Am I ready to die? Has God no further work for me to do in this world?" Although St. Paul desired most ardently

"to be dissolved and to be with Christ," he was perfectly willing "to abide still in the flesh" for the sake of his converts (Phil. i, 23, 24). A woman, who suffered from a painful and tedious malady, wrote: "I hope to live as long as I can be of use to my dear ones, and as long as it can be a joy to my husband and children to have a wife and a mother. . . . One day I fancied that our Lord said to me: 'Wilt thou now go to rest, thou weary child'? and I replied: 'Lord, I have ever sought to accomplish the task that Thou gavest me to do, before lying down to rest, however weary I may be.' When the hour for my departure comes I shall have strength to forsake everything in order to be with Christ, which is indeed far better than this misery."

These words seem to be a beautiful echo of St. Paul's expression. Let us not be too eager to quit this world; God alone knows when it is best for us to die.

3. *Our Lord prayed that His disciples might be kept from evil, and sanctified in truth.* He did not pray that they should be preserved from suffering, in fact He warned them that in the world they would have tribulation. The great thing both in joy and sorrow is to be kept from real evil, *i. e.,* from all that can injure the soul. Thus does our Saviour pray for us, and thus should we pray for ourselves. When we say: "Deliver us from evil," we ought not to think of deliverance from suffering, but of preservation from all that can imperil our salvation. "Sanctify them in truth." What a glorious aim is set before us in these words! We are to think, not of money and earthly possessions, but of purity of mind and body, and increasing sanctity of heart and life. It may even be unprofitable for us to acquire truth, if we regard it merely as an object of knowledge, and seek it only in order to gratify our thirst for information. The disciples were to be *sanctified* in truth, and

we shall make a right use of truth only if it is to us a means of greater sanctification. To ascertain whether we are on the right path or not, we need but consider whether our knowledge of truth exalts or humiliates us in our own sight.

When we think of purity and sanctification, we feel inclined to exclaim like St. Paul: "Unhappy man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. vii, 24). How can I ever attain to true purity and holiness? But every one, who is really striving to do his best, may console himself with the thought that in time he will succeed, because Christ is ever praying for his sanctification.

4. *Our Lord prayed for unity among His disciples.* The followers of Jesus Christ are united with Him in faith and charity, and He prayed that they might be united with one another in a bond as close as that existing between the Father and the Son. "I pray . . . that they all may be one, as Thou, Father, in me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us." The frequency with which our Lord reverted to the idea of unity shows how much importance He attached to it. St. Paul knew no "consolation in Christ," no "comfort of charity" more calculated to fulfil his joy, than the sight of his converts agreeing in opinion, charity and sentiment (Phil. ii, 1, 2). Consequently when we see strife, discord, intolerance and fanaticism prevailing amongst men who call themselves Christians, we are tempted to suppose that they can never have heard of our Lord's prayer or of St. Paul's exhortation. There must be an end of all divisions if there is to be *one* flock. There seems but little prospect of this, for men are proud and obstinate, and fancy themselves wise, and, consequently, Christians are divided into many hostile camps, instead of being of one heart and one mind. Hatred prevails where love should reign supreme, and per-

secution has taken the place of mutual support and protection. When we consider the state of Christendom at the present time, we feel inclined to cry with the Psalmist: "O for the wings of a dove, that I might fly away and find rest!"—away from the land of strife and discord to the abode of peace and charity, for which I yearn.

How does it behoove us to act? Many suggestions might be made, but today I will only urge you to pray earnestly for a new Pentecost, a fresh outpouring of the spirit of humility and love. Without it we are like chaff carried by the wind, and have no strength to withstand the world. We must pray for unity among Christians, and a prayer for unity ought to be offered daily by every follower of Christ. If all the children of Holy Church send up this petition to heaven day by day, it cannot fail to be heard, and we may derive additional comfort and confidence from the thought that in praying thus we are joining in our Saviour's prayer for us. We will never abandon hope therefore, since His prayer must be granted.

5. *Our Lord prayed that His disciples might have joy.* "That they may have my joy filled in themselves." At first sight we might think that our Lord had prayed in vain, for where in this wicked world is perfect joy to be found? Surely such a joy is unattainable by Christ's followers, since they realize the evil of the world, and perceive the sin and guilt about which the world troubles so little. It seems almost incongruous to speak of joy, and we fancy perhaps that gladness is the mark of superficiality, whilst a kind of melancholy is more in keeping with depth of character.

It is certain that Christ's disciples know what sorrow and grief are, because they understand, better than others, the malice of sin. Yet at the same time none feel such true and profound happiness, as they do, because they know their Saviour, the Friend of sinners, more intimately than others know Him. The joy that He desires

His followers to possess is not the thoughtless merriment of worldlings, which is only too apt to give place to disappointment and despondency, or even despair. Our Lord prayed that they might have *His* joy, that they might rejoice as He did. His joy was that of the Lamb of God, whose life was one of sacrifice and suffering; yet even sacrifice and suffering were not incompatible with deep, heartfelt joy, since He had in view the victory to be won by their means.

A Christian, who is at peace with God through Jesus Christ, possesses an unfailing source of joy, far surpassing the happiness of this world. His life often abounds in sacrifices and sufferings, which may repress all outward manifestation of happiness, and yet deep in his heart he knows that it is an honor to him to bear and sacrifice anything for Christ's sake, and he feels a joy of which the world has no conception, and which may rightly be called the joy of Christ Himself; it is a foretaste in this sorrowful world of the eternal joy of heaven. At such moments, rare though they may be, a Christian has his Lord's joy "filled in himself." We must not expect this joy too frequently; it will come whenever we really need it. As a rule, however, we have to rejoice in hope (Rom. xii, 12), the hope of the glory of the sons of God (Rom. v, 2). We are sure that our hope will not be disappointed, because our Lord prayed that we might have joy. The world with all its deceits and illusions, its paltry joys and bitter disappointments can offer us nothing comparable with this hope of glory (Col. i, 27).

No Christian would exchange this joy of hope for the superficial and transitory delights of those who may indeed possess much that we cannot have, but to whom hope, that most indispensable of all good things, is lacking.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

UNITY

"I in them, and thou in me; that they may be made perfect in one, and the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast also loved me."—John xvii, 23.

The thoughts expressed in today's Gospel are so profound that it seems almost presumptuous to explain them by clothing them in other words.

1. Suppose that you have a wise and holy friend, who knows you as thoroughly as it is possible for one man to know another in this world. Being wise, he knows what is to your advantage, and you rely completely upon his opinion. Being holy, he desires your true welfare more ardently than any one else. If you are indeed a Christian, would you not be glad to know that such a friend is praying for you? Would you not like to hear what he asks on your behalf? Would you not be sure that he begs God to give you the best gifts of grace? Would you not learn from his petitions what is really expedient for you and what tends to your peace of mind? Of course you would. But now suppose that the friend who prayed for you was no living man, but an inhabitant of heaven who had loved you dearly here on earth, and now loves you in God's presence; his wisdom and sanctity are now heavenly, not earthly. Would you not esteem it a great happiness to hear the prayer of this happy soul, and to know that your friend is not only praying for you, but is asking for what it is most expedient for you to have? Would you not do your best to ask for and secure the gift that he knows will be good for you?

Holy Scripture tells us that we all possess a friend infinitely wiser and holier than all other friends, however excellent, on earth or in heaven. He knows us perfectly, and therefore He knows what we really need. This friend is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Redeemer of the world. We know that He prays for transgressors, and that, although we have sinned, He is our Advocate with the Father, the high priest ever living to make intercession for us.

Now if we are glad to have a friend on earth to pray for us, and still more glad to have friends in heaven, what inexpressible joy ought we to feel at having a Mediator ever at God's right hand! He that standeth firm should rejoice at having One who supports him, lest he should fall; he that has fallen should rejoice, because there is One who will help him to rise again. Praised be Jesus Christ, our Advocate with the Father!

2. We may well desire to hear His prayer, and to learn what favor He begs for us; we would fain stand for a moment before the throne of grace, and then resume the conflict, knowing with certainty the things that are to our peace. The idea seems fantastic perhaps, but it is not so, for to-day's Gospel reveals to us the Son of God, praying for His friends; we can really hear the petitions that He once offered and still offers for them, for in Him is no change and no shadow of alteration.

3. He prays that His followers may be one in God; that is to say, He prays for the unity of Christians and of the Church. This may seem unimportant to a man who desires discord rather than harmony, and who regards the unity of the Church as a Platonic state, an ideal condition incapable of realization in this world. It appears however of incalculable value to anyone who sees with dismay the quarrels and divisions that now exist, and who clings to the hope of eventual harmony.

Since our divine Advocate prays for unity as a most precious gift, we must believe that it is of the utmost importance for us, and we shall readily acknowledge that it is so, if we reflect on what it means—"that they all may be one, as thou, Father, in me, and I in thee; that they also may be one in us."

This unity is great in its origin, for our Lord tells us how it comes into being: "The glory which thou has given me, I have given to them, that they may be one, as we also are one; I in them, and thou in me." Jesus Christ Himself with His glory abides in all His friends, and is the bond of union between them. If only we understand all that these words convey, we shall appreciate the true and surpassing value of unity. Christ's friends are united with Him by His divine Spirit, which He promised to send them, and which dwells within them. They are further united with Him by His glorified nature, which He bestows upon them in His sacred Body and Blood. In this way they become, as St. Peter says, partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter i, 4), and have a share, not only in God's gifts and happiness, but in God Himself. Regarded thus, unity is seen to be indeed a very great thing!

It is, however, great in its effects, no less than in its origin. Our Lord prays for His friends to be united "that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast also loved me." We cannot suppose that unity is something to be realized only in the next life, for our Lord's words show clearly that He desires it to be a force capable of overcoming the world, and of constraining all men to believe in Him. How can unity accomplish this task? It can do so only if it is unity in Christ. The more thoroughly His friends are filled with His spirit, and with charity, which is the bond of union, the more perfectly they take on His divine and human nature, and the more truly they are united in and with

Him, the better will the world perceive Him in them—the unseen, heavenly Master in the visible body of his Church on earth. In this way unity in Christ becomes a power able to overcome the world, and we can well understand why quarrels and divisions among Christians cause many to deny and abandon the faith, because they cannot perceive our Lord in those who are called by His name. Some people in their disgust at the divided state of Christendom assume nothing else to be possible in this world, but look forward to reunion as an aim attainable only in heaven, and needing a miracle of divine omnipotence for its production. Such people have a very inadequate conception of the Church of Christ.

When our Lord spoke of the kingdom divided against itself, He was not alluding to His Church. On the contrary, He declared that the power of hell should never prevail against her, and that power invariably attempts to sow the seed of discord among His followers. The Church appeared in the history of the world as a community of free and rational human beings. Such a society is always destined to develop, and the Church was no exception to this rule. If we suppose that at her birth the most perfect harmony prevailed, but that she is destined to perish in confusion and disputes, which will be terminated by God only after the end of the world—if, I repeat, this is our idea of the Church, we certainly have an unworthy conception of Christ's own, fairest institution. Her movement through the ages would be retrograde; she would be like a crab, going backwards, whereas it behooves her to advance. No, it is impossible for the Church to have begun in unity and to end in discord. If we imagine a state or society advancing in everything except unity, we are imagining an impossibility, for a society devoid of unity is a contradiction in terms; and this is what our Saviour wished to impress upon us when He spoke of the fall of the kingdom

divided against itself. Unity is a characteristic of the Church, and without it she cannot exist. That she has suffered great losses in consequence cannot be denied, for whole nations have severed their organic connexion with her, though they may be won back in time.

Finally, our Lord's prayer for the unity of the Church is a guarantee that, when He comes again in visible form, He will find *one* flock; the Bridegroom will have but *one* bride. Relying on this hope, and knowing that our Master wishes us to cooperate with Him in effecting its realization, we ought all to stand firmly united, and pray daily, as He prayed, *ut omnes unum sint,* that all men may be one.

THE SUNDAY AFTER THE ASCENSION

THE DESTINY OF THE CHURCH IN THE WORLD

"But when the Paraclete cometh, whom I will send you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceedeth from the Father, he shall give testimony of me."—John xv, 26.

Our Lord's own fate foreshadowed the destiny of His Church; hatred and persecution would be followed by ultimate triumph.

I. *Hatred and persecution.*—Jesus Christ was meek and gentle of heart; He went about doing good to the sick, the poor and the suffering; He sought not His own glory, but patiently endured humiliation for the truth's sake; He aimed at no worldly advantage, and was so poor that He had not where to lay His head; and He sacrificed honor, happiness and life itself to save sinners. And yet no one was ever more bitterly hated. He had indeed some few friends, but most people detested Him, especially the ruling classes, whose hatred finally brought about His death.

This is a fact full of significance, and His kingdom, the Church, has at all times shared His fate. He foretold that this should be the case, and from the very beginning she has been hated and persecuted, although her members led honest and Godfearing lives, following their Master's example, and desiring, like Him, to save souls and make men happy in this world and the next. Their reward has always been hatred and persecution, and it is the same still, although our enemies now have recourse to other means, and have discarded the rack and the gallows. Never have they been more successful among the masses, and especially amongst those who now possess the ruling power.

If the Church, when suffering from the world's hostility, had had no other consolation than the knowledge that after all she was but sharing her Master's lot, this alone would have sufficed to encourage her. It is absolutely certain that our Saviour was hated, although He had right on His side, yes, although He was Himself the way, the truth and the life.

In the same way the Church may comfort herself with the thought that the hatred of the world and the falling away of whole nations furnish no evidence against her possession of the truth, nor against St. Paul's assertion that she is the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim. iii, 15). The same thought affords consolation to every one who takes part in the work of making known the truth. We are apt to despond if the masses turn against us, and we may even doubt doctrines that we once preached with ardent faith and enthusiasm. It seems so reasonable to suppose that the majority must have right on their side; that they have power is an unquestionable fact, and we are timid, and like to sail with the tide. If Christ had acted thus, He would have ruined His cause, and the same may be said of the Church. No one ever had the tide more completely against Him than our Lord, and in every age the Church has encountered opposition. May we not think that this has been the case precisely because she possesses the truth?

Let us adhere loyally to the truth that we have received and be faithful to the teaching of Christ and His Church, even though the majority is against us, and we have to endure to some slight extent the scorn and opposition of the world. Bitterness, ill will and hatred on the part of persecutors are apt to call forth the same feelings on that of their victims; but if we yield to such emotions, we shall be condemned with our opponents. Jesus Christ accepted the bitterness and hatred of His enemies with gentleness and humil-

ity, looking upon them as a cross that could never crush His charity. Let us follow His example, lest we be carried away by the tide, and perish like the children of this world! I said just now that the Church of Christ may have encountered the world's opposition precisely because she possesses the truth. This is really the case, and she may derive great consolation from it. Jesus Christ, who is the Truth, came to the world and to His own, and they received Him not, because they loved darkness rather than light. Why are most men hostile to Christ and His Church? Do they know the truth better than our Lord? No; it is because the world hates the truth, that it also hates Christ and His Church. Why does it hate the truth? Our Lord gives the answer in to-day's gospel: "Because they have not known the Father nor me." Is their ignorance excusable? No; He is speaking of those who have every opportunity of knowing the Father and the Son, but nevertheless shut their eyes to the truth, as they have an instinctive feeling that it would cost them something to recognize it. They refuse to admit its supremacy, because it would interfere with their comfort and with the worldly amusements in which they delight, and would require of them self-sacrifice and fidelity even unto death. This is the real reason why most people hate the truth and the Church of Christ; and we can easily understand the motive underlying their hatred. A perception of this fact should make us stronger and more resolute to fight in defence of what we know to be the truth.

II. *Victory.*—The thing that gives Christ's followers peculiar courage and strength in conflict, is the certainty that, in spite of all opposition, their cause will ultimately prevail. Our Saviour triumphed, though He was apparently overcome, and the Church, being His own institution, must, like Him, eventually triumph; did

He not promise that the gates of hell should never prevail against her?

She will triumph, not merely in spite of opposition, but to a great extent through opposition. When our Saviour hung bleeding and dying on the Cross, His enemies exulted in their victory. But His death is our life, this apparent defect is the triumph of eternal truth over the powers of death and falsehood. His foes became the means whereby were secured our Lord's own triumph, the overthrow of death and our salvation. This furnishes the Church of Christ with a guarantee that she will finally overcome the same enemies; and history records many instances in which she has come forth victorious. At the time when men believed themselves to be doing God service by persecuting His followers, and when the blood of martyrs was flowing freely, the Church grew and prospered. The martyrs' blood did not choke the good seed, but fertilized it.

The same law still holds good. Just as an individual gains courage and strength through meeting with opposition, so does the Church. At the present time she has to encounter most bitter hostility, but she will triumph, on account of it as well as in spite of it.

PENTECOST

THE HOLY GHOST

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman."—John xv, 1.

The three chief festivals of the Church are like three precious stones, all of equal beauty and value, but each possessing its own peculiar color and charm. Christmas reminds us of the Father, who sent His Son into the world for its redemption. There can be nothing greater or more glorious than this gift, and therefore "Blessed be the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ now and forevermore." But what would Christmas be without Easter—the resurrection of our crucified Saviour? What benefit should we derive from the coming of God the Son into this world, if He had not died for our sins and risen again from the dead? There can be nothing greater and more glorious than His death and resurrection, therefore "Blessed be Jesus Christ, now and for evermore." But what would Easter be without Pentecost? What significance would our Lord's death and Resurrection have had for us without the Holy Ghost, who alone can bring us to Christ? Without the gift bestowed at Pentecost we should have no faith in Christ, nor should we be united with Him, for we owe both our faith and our union with Him to the Holy Ghost. There can be nothing greater and more glorious than this faith and union,—therefore, "Blessed be the Holy Ghost, now and for evermore."

I. We are keeping the feast of the Holy Ghost, and yet there is no allusion to Him in our text, at least no explicit allusion; but when our Lord speaks of Himself as the vine, and of His disciples

as the branches, we may believe the Holy Ghost to be the sap, flowing from the root and stem to every leaf and tendril, and conveying life and strength to every part. This is a token, which it is most important for us to observe, of our possession of the Holy Spirit and of our union with Christ. We ought to notice in the first place that the Holy Ghost is the spirit of sanctity, without which no one can see God. Hence, St. Peter reminds the early Christians: "It is written, 'you shall be holy, for I am holy'" (1 Peter i, 16). We cannot have the spirit of God, nor can we be united with Christ in the Holy Ghost, unless we are striving to be holy. This sanctity is the fruit of which our Saviour spoke when He said that His followers should bring forth much fruit. He who brings forth none, will be cast out as a barren and unproductive branch, and thrown into the fire. Is not this a stringent order requiring us to aim at holiness of life?

Many desire forgiveness of sins and speak of its necessity, and they think Christianity exists for no other purpose than to enable them to obtain pardon. Suppose a son offends his father grievously, and then asks for and receives forgiveness. This happens again and again; but the young man is satisfied when he is pardoned; he never attempts to improve, or to avoid giving offence in future, and goes on wounding his parents by his wickedness. Surely he is a worthless wretch. In the same way, a kind of Christianity that stops short at faith in the forgiveness of sins, and never aims at sanctity, is a miserable thing, devoid of the spirit of God, for the Holy Ghost is a Spirit of sanctity.

Christ desires us to bring forth the fruits of a holy life, *i. e.,* He wishes us gradually to improve, to grow more just and charitable in our dealings with others, more humble and severe in judging ourselves. Do those who call themselves Christians invariably display

these characteristics? If you are uncharitable, irritable, untrustworthy, harsh towards others, self-satisfied and self-indulgent, there is much reason to fear that your profession of Christianity is vain, and that you do not possess the Holy Spirit, and are not united with Christ in that Spirit.

II. We must note further that the Holy Ghost is the Spirit of truth, speaking to us in the word of God. Hence Christ bids us "continue in His word," *i. e.,* in the word of God. Unless we act thus, we shall not possess the Holy Spirit. We must *continue* in the word, not hear or read it just once or twice, but study it with persevering zeal. We must read it in our homes, and hear it in God's house, regularly and carefully, otherwise we are not continuing in the word. If God's word is not familiar to us, we become estranged from the Holy Spirit, which bears testimony through the word, especially in God's house.

III. God's Spirit is the Spirit of prayer, and in the gospel Christ urges us to pray, and promises that we shall be heard. Where prayer is unknown, the Spirit of God is absent, for wherever it is present, it impels men to pray. Our Lord does not merely invite us to pray, He demands it of us as a duty, inseparable from the worship of God. He wishes us to honor Him by offering Him praise, thanksgiving and prayer. He bids us regard His house as a house of prayer, the place where He will accept the worship of our hearts and lips. Consequently where the churches stand empty, the hearts of men are undoubtedly devoid of the Spirit of God, and are not in union with Christ.

IV. The spirit of God is the Spirit of love, and Jesus Christ requires love of us. He says: "Abide in my love." Absence of love denotes absence of the Holy Spirit, who always inspires love. We cannot evade our Lord's claim upon our love; we ought to love

Him more than father, or mother, or wife, or child. I remember how, when I was a child, this commandment filled me with fear, for it seemed to me impossible not to love my mother best of all, and yet God required me to love Him still more. God commands us to love Him, so it is our duty to obey. For our consolation, however, He tells us how this can be done: "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me." "If you keep my commandments, you shall abide in my love." Our Lord does not care about our feelings, which are not under our own control, and which have no permanence; but He wants us honestly to resolve to keep His commandments, to do our duty and to accomplish His will, although we may do so only very imperfectly, for all human actions are necessarily imperfect. This is the love that He claims, and any one who intends to give it Him, receives grace and strength. I remember distinctly the happiness that I felt, when this doctrine concerning the duty of loving God was explained to me. The Spirit of God assists everyone who strives to do and be what our Saviour desires. Hence the commandment of love alarms hypocrites, who talk a great deal about their emotions, and take no pains to please our Lord. Here again is consolation for honest though timid souls; for they must be aware that they desire nothing so ardently as to be able to say, with St. Peter: "Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee," and to do God's will, imperfectly perhaps, but still as well as they can.

Therefore, if the Spirit of Pentecost is to dwell within us, we must be in earnest about our own sanctification; we must continue in God's word; we must lead a life of prayer in our homes as well as at church; and we must love God by striving to obey Him and to do our duty. All these things involve much effort on our part, and we should ever bear in mind our Saviour's words: "Without me

ye can do nothing." To boast of our own powers and merits would be as foolish as for a little branch of a vine to boast of the grapes that hang upon it. All the credit of producing good fruit belongs to the vine and to the sap that flows through the branches, and, in the same way, all the credit of whatever good there may be in our lives belongs to Christ and His Holy Spirit, which permeates the whole body of the Church. Without Him we can indeed do nothing, but it is our fault if we are unfruitful branches; the cause of unfruitfulness is always the same,—refusal to abide in Christ.

TRINITY SUNDAY

BAPTISM, LAW AND THE CHURCH

"Going therefore teach ye all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."—Matt. xxviii, 19.

The days of our Lord's glorified life on earth were drawing to a close; His great task of redemption had been completed on Calvary, and solemnly recognized by Almighty God on Easter day. The Church was founded, her corner-stone was laid, and the outline of her future development was sketched. Now our Divine Saviour was about to take leave of this world, and especially of His chosen Apostles, who were thenceforth to enter upon their inheritance, and carry to every land the seed that He had sown with His words and watered with His Blood. "More than five hundred brethren" (1 Cor. xv, 6) were assembled on the mountain in Galilee, eagerly awaiting the coming of their risen Lord. Suddenly He stood before them, and the Apostles fell to the ground in adoration, for their faith would never waver again, but others, who had not yet seen Him since His resurrection, still doubted whether it were indeed their Master whom they beheld. He fixed His eyes upon the Apostles, and said solemnly: "All power is given to me in heaven and in earth. Going therefore teach ye all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world." In these words our Redeemer conferred upon His Apostles their threefold office, and commissioned them to be teachers, priests and shepherds of our ransomed race. Yet not of them alone did He think; He had in mind all who should succeed

the Apostles and carry on their work, for He spoke of all nations, and of their task being continued until the end of the world.

I. *Baptism.*—Baptism effects the inward and outward incorporation of men into God's Kingdom. It was natural therefore that our Lord, when solemnly sending out the Apostles to found this kingdom, should order them to baptize all nations. This fact ought to be seriously considered by those who profess to see nothing in holy Baptism but a meaningless ceremony, as well as by those who think that it is merely a symbolical rite, typifying the purification of the soul.

No; at our Baptism we are really cleansed from sin, which is an obstacle to our admission to God's kingdom; we are really made members of Christ and His Church.

Baptism is not a mere type of sanctification, but actually renders us holy, and therefore it is of the very highest importance. We bring our children to be baptized, and it behooves us further to remember, as they grow up, that they are Christ's disciples. It is possible, of course, to have what may be called an exaggerated view of Baptism, and to imagine that any one who has received this Sacrament need trouble no more about his salvation. Such a view is completely mistaken, and perhaps not many people fall into such a disastrous error; we more frequently meet those who underestimate the importance of Baptism.

To our sorrow we perceive many faults in baptized children, and see signs in them of the influence of the world and the flesh. Only too often thy go astray altogether from the right path, and we are apt to despair of them, and to regard them as little heathens. We forget that a baptized child can never be the same as a heathen, for, although we may break our covenant with God, He never breaks His covenant with us. We forget that at Baptism the seed of life

is planted in a child's heart, and although this seed may decay and perish, yet by God's grace it can always be called back to life and growth. Anxious parents, who grieve over a child given up to sin, should not lose hope, but rely on the strength of the covenant with God, concluded at the child's Baptism; the covenant may indeed be weakened, but it can always be renewed and strengthened.

II. *Law.*—What else did our Lord say to His disciples at the solemn moment when He was about to leave them? He told them that, besides baptizing all nations, they were to teach them to observe all things whatsoever He had commanded. Did He not mention faith, when giving His disciples this commission? Is it not strange that there is here no allusion to faith in Jesus Christ, the root of all justification? By no means, for in the first place there is a reference to faith in the words immediately following, and, secondly, our Saviour was speaking to the Apostles, His own chosen servants. No servant of Christ can be wanting in faith, and least of all did these first servants need admonition to keep the faith. Their faith was too firm ever to be overcome. We can see from our Lord's words that living faith alone is of value in His sight, living faith that reveals itself in keeping His commandments. Many make loud profession of their faith, and seem to think that this is enough, for at the same time they trample the commandments under foot, and disregard all Christ's teaching. Others, who are good and honest, learn by painful experience that it is not easy to keep the commandments, and that many struggles and much self-conquest are necessary. More genuine is the faith of those who make no loud protestations, and may perhaps say humbly: "Lord, I believe; help Thou my unbelief," but who, by observing Christ's commandments and precepts, show that their faith is real and living.

If we read the psalms of David, or the writings of the prophets,

or our Lord's discourses recorded in the gospels, we everywhere find exhortations to do God's will, to obey His commandments, and to lead an upright and honest life. No one can do this unless he have faith; but a believer is strictly bound to live in accordance with his faith, otherwise he is practically false to it, and faith means nothing to him, if it ceases to influence his daily life.

In times of strong spiritual emotion, men often act in a way that is reprehensible; they do many things that do not savor of true Christianity at all, and sometimes those who boast of their faith, and of the necessity of "faith alone," fall very low, and occasion much scandal. This is probably due to their having adopted the fatal theory that all must be quite easy if only they have faith. They forget that Christ bids us all keep His commandments; they delight in the thought that they enjoy the privileges of children in their father's house, and they overlook the fact that even such children have certain duties to perform.

III. *The Church.*—Jesus Christ established His kingdom on earth, the holy, Catholic and apostolic Church. It consisted primarily of His Apostles, who represented the Church when they assembled at the solemn hour of His departure. The world hates and persecutes this kingdom. It hated and persecuted the Apostles, and their successors, who, like them, strove to fulfil our Lord's commandment to baptize and teach all nations. The world can make life very hard for the followers of Christ; it can rob them of honor and even of life, but it cannot deprive them of their courage and confidence, because they rely upon their Master's promise: "Behold, I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world." He possessed all power in heaven and in earth, and therefore we are absolutely certain that the world will never be able to overthrow His kingdom.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

THE CROSS

"Then Jesus said to his disciples: 'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.'"—Matt. xvi, 24.

In heaven there is a great multitude of the blessed, each having a palm of victory in his hand, a crown upon his head and the joy of triumph in his heart. If we could question each of them singly, and ask by what path they reached the glory of heaven, one and all would reply: "We followed the way of the Cross." *Per crucem ad lucem,* through the cross to everlasting light. Each bore his cross, and this must needs be so, since our Saviour said: "Whosoever doth not carry his cross, and come after Me, cannot be My disciple." It is by means of the Cross that He recognizes His followers, and consequently they love and value it. A man who does nothing but grumble at the weight of his cross, is not one of our Lord's disciples.

I. *The School of the Cross.* Our Saviour tells us that we must deny ourselves. Now some people seem to fancy that it is possible to be a Christian without practising any self-denial, and to confess Christ whilst leading a life in no respect different from that of a thoroughly worldly man. They think it unnecessary to mortify their vanity and ambition, and forget that our Lord said: "How can you believe, who receive glory one from another, and the glory which is from God alone, you do not seek?" (John v, 44). They deem it superfluous to curb their love of criticising, judging and condemning others, and indulge it freely, although Christ said: "Judge not, that you may not be judged" (Matt. vii, 1). They do not attempt to bridle their tongues, and do not hesitate to slander their neigh-

bors. They refuse to put a charitable interpretation upon the words and deeds of others, and take everything in bad part. They cherish ardent desires, and cannot endure disappointment.

If all this is compatible with Christianity, where is the self-denial, which our Lord requires of everyone who would be His disciple? How terribly do such people deceive themselves!

Self-denial is indispensable because we are sinners, and our wills must be mortified, because they are sinful. Even if they were not sinful, they would still have to yield to the will of God. Our divine and sinless Redeemer, speaking as man, prayed, saying: "Father, not my will but Thine be done." He taught us likewise to say: "Thy will be done"—God's will, not our own. If we are to attain to everlasting happiness, we must learn truly to subordinate our wills to God's, and that can be learnt only through self-denial. Cost what it may, we must deny ourselves. If we are tempted to make money by dishonest means, we must banish the thought, and remember that our Saviour said: "What doth it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul?" (Matt. xvi, 26). If we are tempted to curry favor with the world by disloyalty or falsehood, remember how St. Peter declared that we ought to obey God rather than men (Acts v, 29). Why should we trouble about the judgments of men? "He that judgeth me is the Lord" (1 Cor. iv, 4). It is better to withstand the whole world than to deny what we know to be the truth. If we are tempted to impurity, we should bear in mind that we have only to resist the devil, and he will fly from us. If we feel intense desire to speak evil of our neighbors, we must not imagine that some hypocritical expression of sorrow or sympathy will take away the venom from our words, but we must resolutely refrain from saying anything at all, for "he that keepeth his mouth and his tongue, keepeth his soul from dis-

tress" (Prov. xxi, 23). If horrible thoughts and suggestions present themselves, we must condemn them at once, for, as Holy Scripture tells us, charity thinketh no evil.

The Sacraments, and especially the most holy Sacrament of the Altar, supply us with strength to deny ourselves; nothing is so well adapted to make us pure and strong, as the pure and holy human nature of our Lord, incorporated with our nature. Let us therefore have recourse very frequently to Holy Communion.

We derive strength also from God's holy word, from prayer, and from studying the lives of the saints, and trying to imitate, not so much their outward actions, but rather their humility, obedience and self-denial. Our power of denying ourselves grows with practice, like every other faculty, and unless it is used, it will vanish altogether. Let us therefore begin at once to deny ourselves in little things, and voluntarily deprive ourselves of permissible pleasures and luxuries. Then, if ever duty requires us to give up some great thing, we shall be ready to make the sacrifice. The saints reached their height of mortification and sanctity by continually denying themselves in little things.

II. *The Burden of the Cross.* Self-denial is the school in which we learn to take up our cross, for whoever surrenders his own will, in order that God's will may be done, is showing his readiness to bear the burden that may be laid upon him. This is what is meant by taking up one's cross. Our crosses are made up of suffering of one kind or another. Sickness and poverty may be heavy crosses, and yet, strange to say, two of the happiest people, that I have ever met, were afflicted with terrible maladies. One of them put me completely to shame. I was beginning to tell him how deeply I sympathized with him in his misfortunes, when he interrupted me almost impatiently with the words: "I am quite contented." He

understood how to desire whatever God gives us, even though it may thwart our own natural love of ease and comfort. He carried his cross as did our Saviour, who said: "Not my will but Thine be done." To be set aside and rendered incapable of active work is a heavy cross, which becomes lighter however if the sufferer remembers that God is only giving him another occupation, and that there is no change in his aim, which is to do God's will, and work out his salvation. He will still find work enough to do if he practises prayer, mortification and humility.

Others find it hard to be unappreciated by those about them, and to encounter harsh words, unkind actions and unjust criticism. Yet this cross can be borne by one who has given up caring about the opinions of men; he has learnt how to be silent and patient, and if he is obliged to speak, he waits until he is master of his own feelings, lest he should sin with his tongue. Every Christian has to bear his own peculiar cross, and we must not recklessly assume that another's cross is lighter than ours, it may only be less visible. Perhaps the heaviest cross of all is to suffer in silence great anguish of mind; this cross is one that may be quite imperceptible to all but the sufferer himself.

III. *The Way of the Cross.* But why, it may be asked, must we tread the path of suffering, the way of the Cross? A believer's sins are forgiven through Jesus Christ; ought not the punishment of sins also to be remitted? If Christ suffered for us, why should we be punished?

Unless we know the answer to this question, we cannot bear our crosses as we ought, for they would be an inexplicable mystery, an unendurable burden. Hence it is most important for us to understand that by His precious Blood our Lord obtained for us the remission of the eternal punishment due to sin, but the temporal

punishment remains. That it is sometimes very severe is quite intelligible to one who considers God's sanctity and justice on the one hand, and on the other the imperfect character of our penance. Moreover, the punishment that we undergo serves as a deterrent from sin, and as a means of purifying our souls. God desires nothing but our good, and He reveals His love, when He lays the cross upon our shoulders; for it is designed to detach us from the world, to raise us above the deceptions of this life, and to strengthen us against the uncharitable judgments and hostility of our fellow men. Thus the way of the Cross is strewn with joys, hidden, it is true, from the world, and incomprehensible to it, but felt and understood by those who possess the faith, and who can say, like St. Paul: "We glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience trial, and trial hope." We hope to obtain the crown, but there is only one path—the way of the Cross—whereby we can attain to it—*Per crucem ad lucem.*

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

THE TRUTH AND GOOD MANNERS

"And Jesus answering, spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying: 'Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath day.'"—Luke xiv, 3.

In to-day's Gospel we read that our Lord accepted an invitation given Him by one of the chief of the Pharisees, a man occupying a high position and much esteemed by his own people. We may safely assume that he paid great attention to the exact observance of the law, and he probably was refined and well-educated, not at all the sort of person to tolerate any bad manners or want of courtesy in his house. Jesus arrived as his guest, knowing of course perfectly well how a guest should behave towards his host. Certainly our Lord never intended to be discourteous, to speak in an unseemly manner, or to make any inconsiderate remark incompatible with truth and charity. He knew better than any one else how to comply with the demands of both charity and truth, and consequently, when occasion required, He set aside all regard for public opinion and the customs of polite society. This was the case in the instance recorded by St. Luke. The strict observer of the Jewish law considered it wrong to heal the sick on the Sabbath day, and nevertheless Christ healed the man suffering from dropsy in his very house and in the presence of his guests. This action naturally displeased all the assembled company, and especially the master of the house. They were undoubtedly scandalized, but truth required our Lord to correct their mistaken views regarding the Sabbath, and charity impelled Him to relieve a sufferer. On the same occasion He rebuked His fellow guests for their eager-

ness to secure the most honorable places at the banquet, and recommended them to choose rather the lowest seats. These words were another ground of offence both for the host and his friends. No one would like his guests to be treated thus in his own house and at his own table. This want of consideration and breach of good manners must have caused great annoyance to the refined Pharisee, but to our Lord the truth was of paramount importance, and, after all, rules of etiquette, that do not agree with the truth, are no sign of good breeding. Christ did not lose the opportunity of impressing upon those about Him a weighty, though unpleasant truth. Finally the host himself received a rebuke, and was told bluntly that, instead of inviting the aristocracy to his feast, he ought to call the poor, the maimed, the lame and the blind. This remark certainly seemed most offensive to the giver of the feast, and he probably resolved never again to invite this guest who made things so uncomfortable; perhaps he would have turned Him out, then and there, had it not been the Sabbath, when all disturbance had to be avoided.

Our Lord knew well enough what impression His words would make upon the Pharisees, but in the interests of truth He felt bound to speak, and to disregard the ordinary conventions of society. The result to Himself was that people looked upon Him as a rough, ignorant person, and despised Him for His lack of breeding. Jesus foresaw, of course, that this would be the case, but He willingly endured contempt, although most of us find it very hard to bear, and shrink from incurring it, even when it behooves us to do so for the truth's sake. In every age many believe in the truth, but are indifferent to it. Many even value and respect it, but are unwilling to sacrifice anything in order to bear witness to it. They would never dream of offending against good manners, or of allowing others to think them boorish and ignorant, simply for the sake of

the truth; and they would consider it an absolute impossibility to run counter to current opinion and to the prejudices of the majority, or, by giving offense, to bring down upon themselves ill will, unpopularity, hatred and possibly persecution. Such people may not be cowardly enough actually to assent to what they know to be false and wrong, but they listen quietly to false and erroneous statements, without attempting to stand up for the truth, and without uttering a word of protest. They excuse themselves by saying: "Anything for the sake of peace and a quiet life;" but our Lord did not act thus, and it is His disciples' duty to follow His example. He who does not follow this example may flatter himself perhaps that he is one of our Saviour's adherents, but in reality he is nothing of the kind.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

OUTWARD OBSERVANCES

"This people honoreth Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me."—Mark vii, 6.

In to-day's Gospel our Saviour discusses external matters, and therefore for once let us consider their significance. His words recorded in this passage and elsewhere have led many people to condemn every outward observance in Christianity. Such people think that they are interpreting His meaning, whereas they are falling into the mistake of refusing to think of anything that is not exclusively spiritual. If they were right, God would have blundered, when He created a visible, material world.

Our Saviour had no intention whatever of condemning the outward side of Christianity, and if we study this Gospel carefully, we shall see that what He condemned was the abuse, not the use, of external things. He condemned this abuse sternly, because it was very common and very disastrous in its results, but He did not utter a single word against the proper use of external things.

I. The Jews inherited from their ancestors many religious customs and ceremonies, which were not all prescribed in Holy Scripture. They esteemed and honored this inheritance very highly, and adhered rigidly to these ancient practices. The evangelists tell us that on many occasions the Scribes and Pharisees found fault with our Lord for His laxity in this respect. They never ate without having washed their hands, and they were scrupulously careful to cleanse cups and dishes, not only because they set a high value on cleanliness, but also to avoid defilement, as their hands or utensils

might possibly have come into contact with something technically unclean. They showed their reverence for God by giving Corban, *i. e.,* incense offerings, to the Temple; they prayed with their lips rather than their hearts, repeating aloud many prescribed prayers, and doing, as our Lord said, many other things like to these.

But Jesus did not utter a single word against these external practices; what He condemned was their abuse. He judged those who pray only with their lips, whilst their hearts are far from God. He did not say that vocal prayer was worthless, but He called those hypocrites whose prayer is nothing but lip service. He did not find fault with outward cleanliness, but with men who are scrupulously clean in preparing their food, whilst they care nothing for purity of heart, and do not hesitate to use foul and uncharitable language. He did not forbid people to lavish money on the Temple, and to offer money for the adornment of God's house, but He would not allow such gifts to be an excuse for neglect of filial duties; He would have no one plead that he could not support father or mother, because he had contributed generously to the Temple treasury. It is good to be zealous for the beauty of God's house, but it is better to honor one's father and mother, though the best of all is to do both. In this case the traditional custom was actually opposed to God's law, and not merely a practice that the law did not prescribe, so that those who observed it were actually transgressing and making void the commandment of God.

II. The Church, too, possesses many ancient customs and ceremonies, some of which are not explicitly ordained by God. In our childhood we are taught to make a sign of the Cross when we get up, and to kneel in prayer. Is there any harm in making the sign of the Cross before beginning to pray? It is horrible hypocrisy to begin a religious exercise in this way if we care nothing about the

salvation of our souls, but it is good and commendable if we are in earnest. The holy sign should remind us that we are, as it were, consecrating ourselves in preparation for an audience with the Lord of heaven and earth; and it really helps us to shut out the world from our hearts and minds, and to fill us with holy thoughts.

Is there any harm in kneeling at prayer as St. Paul did? He says that he bowed his knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (Ephes. iii, 14). To kneel is odious hypocrisy if a man professes to cast himself down as a sinner and humble himself before God, whilst really he is vain and self-satisfied. But for a man who is in earnest, it is good to bend his knees, as well as to humble his heart before almighty God. If there is no pretence about it, kneeling is not only a sign of humility, but is a means of abasing ourselves in the sight of God.

Is there any harm in using holy water? The use of it is mere hypocrisy in one who never thinks of purifying his soul, but to one who, like David, fervently prays: "Wash me and I shall be made whiter than snow," it is a means of attaining to purity of heart.

Fasting, especially on certain days, is another outward observance, which has always been practised by God's people, under both the old and the new dispensation. The Apostles and early Christians used to fast (Acts xiii, 2; xiv, 22; 1 Cor, vii, 5; 2 Cor. vi, 5; xi, 27). Surely it cannot be wrong to observe a custom commended and practised by Christ Himself? (Matt. vi, 16; ix, 15; xvii, 20; iv, 2). Yes, it is a contemptible display of hypocrisy, if a man simply eats and drinks somewhat less than usual, under the idea that thus he satisfies God's demands and makes no effort to restrain his impure thoughts or to amend his sinful way of life. Such a man should remember that "Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man" (Matt. xv, 11). Is fasting, therefore, reprehensible? By

no means. A practise commended by our Lord and His Apostles cannot be bad. Instead of asking whether it is a mistake to fast, we ought to inquire how Christians could dare to abolish a custom for which there is such good authority, and which is so frequently recommended in Holy Scripture. An earnest Christian knows that it is a means of rousing the soul to devotion and of subduing the flesh with its evil lusts and passions. Fasting practised thus is a sacrifice well pleasing to God.

We have mentioned only a few of our ordinary Catholic customs. Speaking in general terms we may say: If all that is external in Christianity were bad, it would have been wrong for God to make His revelation to us in words, for words are also external; He ought not to communicate grace by the water of baptism, since water is something external. And Jesus Christ should not have given us His precious Body and Blood under the forms of bread and wine, since bread and wine are external things.

The lesson taught by to-day's gospel is this: Make use of external things, but do not be hypocritical in the use that you make of them.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

CHILDISH PEOPLE AND OBSTINATE

"Whereunto shall I esteem this generation to be like? It is like to children sitting in the market place."—Matt. xi, 16.

The first part of to-day's Gospel is not altogether easy to understand, but the general meaning is clear; our Lord reproaches the Jews with being childish and obstinate.

I. *Childish People.*—The Jews were like children, so full of whims and vagaries that it was impossible to please them. They swayed to and fro between two extremes, as we see from their behavior towards St. John the Baptist and our Lord Himself. Why were they so fickle? After the lapse of several hundred years a new prophet had arisen in Israel, and this fact had the charm of novelty and flattered the national vanity of the Jews. But the new prophet preached a doctrine of penance, not calculated to please his contemporaries. They could not help feeling a lively interest in him, and we can readily account for this. The Morgue in Paris is a place where the bodies of unknown persons are displayed for identification. In this horrible place lie the corpses of men and women who have been drowned or murdered, or who have committed suicide; no gloomier spot exists perhaps on earth, and yet elegant carriages often stop at its door, and fashionably dressed people may frequently be seen there. Why do they go thither? Because they have exhausted all the amusements that they can discover, and wish to stimulate their jaded nerves by the sight of horrors. For the same reason St. John's doctrine of penance might for a time attract worldly-minded persons, who "were willing to rejoice in his light" (John v, 35); and even Herod heard him gladly

(Mark vi, 20). Only for a time, however—their enthusiasm soon died out, and they considered St. John too strict. He practised the utmost self-denial himself, and required others to do the same, and so they declared that he had a devil, and turned against him.

When Jesus Christ came preaching the Gospel, He was more moderate in His demands, and did not make it obligatory for any one to practise severe mortification, although He never condemned it, provided that it was not excessive. On one occasion He advised some one to sell all that he possessed and give the proceeds to the poor; but He did not require every one to act thus or else forfeit all claim to eternal happiness. Consequently the fickle populace thought our Lord lax and too easy-going, and condemned Him as a glutton and a wine-drinker.

Their changeable disposition marked the Jews as childish. Some children, when at play, copy the behavior of their elders on occasions of rejoicing, but others refuse to join in the game. Some, like grown-up people at that time, raise a loud cry of mourning, as if a death had taken place, and again their playfellows stand aloof. The Jews behaved in this manner, and for grown-up men and women to display so childish a disposition is a serious fault.

Have people at the present day learned not to be childish? Have they ceased to waver between two extremes, and to be at one moment very severe and at another excessively slack and careless?

I am afraid that many of us still act like foolish children; under the influence of strong emotion they are for a time very strict with themselves and others, and life becomes for them a sad and gloomy business. If they regard anything as wrong, they cannot endure that another should dare to use, enjoy or even touch it. They are unmerciful in passing judgment upon others; and those who do not agree with them are all condemned indiscriminately, just as the

Jews condemned our Lord, calling Him "a glutton and a wine-drinker, a friend of publicans and sinners." They refuse to recognize any one as a good Christian who is less strict than they are in external matters.

All this lasts for a time, and then they feel it unendurable, and they begin to relax the tension. At first the change is very slight, and, in their opinion, quite safe; but they grow more and more slack, even with regard to more important things, and at last their laxity affects even actual duties, and they do not hesitate to neglect prayer, to commit various sins, to miss hearing Mass and to receive the Sacraments. They talk now on the liberty of the Gospel, and of the cheerful side of Christianity, and whereas before they refrained from all freedom and happiness, now they give themselves up to amusement, scarcely noticing that they are yielding to the spirit of worldliness, until perhaps it has altogether taken possession of them.

Such alternations of strictness and laxity are childish, and very dangerous in grown-up people. This childishness is rendered more conspicuous by the obstinacy with which people condemn to-day what they extolled yesterday. If we are to live as reasonable, sane Christians, we must distinguish clearly between what we are *allowed* to do, although it might be better for us to refrain from it, and what we must *abstain* from, because, being really sinful, it would imperil our salvation.

II. *Obstinate people.*—Obstinacy is a worse fault than childishness, although they are often connected, and our Lord coupled them together. The Jews were a particularly obstinate race, and our Lord condemned Corozain and Bethsaida, two towns on the Lake of Genesareth on account of the hardness of heart displayed by their inhabitants. They would be judged, He said, more severely than Tyre and Sidon, the great Phoenician trading cities, since if

in these latter places the same miracles had been wrought, the population would have done penance in sackcloth and ashes. Christ spoke of Capharnaum, His own city, still more sternly, saying that at the day of judgment it should be more tolerable for Sodom, in spite of the sins for which the latter city was notorious.

How is it with ourselves in this respect? Have we not been reminded and invited over and over again to repent? Shall we be judged less guilty than the people of Capharnaum? Surely not, for our sin is greater than theirs, inasmuch as Christ has spoken to us more plainly than to them. St. John the Baptist warned men to repent and do penance for their sins, and sometimes his hearers were deeply impressed by his words, yet nevertheless they refused to forsake sin and to be converted. Jesus Christ speaks to us in the gentle language of the gospel Sunday after Sunday, and we hear His call and heed it not. Every Sunday is His gift, and many of us spend the day in worldly amusements and self-indulgence. We refuse to obey His law, and shut our ears to the teaching of the gospel, for we have no desire to be converted. May our Lord's words to-day fall on humble and believing hearts, that do not resist His grace; then and then only shall we obtain that peace, which every human heart secretly longs to possess.

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

HOW DO WE LEARN TO CONFESS CHRIST?

"And Jesus came into the quarters of Caesarea Philippi, and He asked His disciples, saying: 'Whom do men say that the Son of Man is?'"—Matt. xvi, 11.

Jesus asks: "Whom do men say that the Son of Man is?" The Jews gave various answers; some thought He was John the Baptist, whom they supposed to have risen from the dead. Herod was one of these, for his conscience was uneasy, as he had put St. John to death. Others said that our Lord was Elias, because the prophet Malachias had foretold that God would send Elias first, before His own Son (Mal. iv, 5). Others again declared Him to be Jeremias or some other prophet, who had risen from the dead and could work miracles. In short there were many conflicting opinions about our Lord, and the Jews did not know what to think of Him, for they deliberated with men of flesh and blood, and hoped to be enlightened thus. This was their mistake; flesh and blood can reveal nothing, nor can they supply any answer to the question, "What think ye of Christ?" They have no information to give us. Every individual has to answer the same question. Some say that Jesus Christ had a divine element in His nature, but they deny that He is God, for they do not believe in the Blessed Trinity. Flesh and blood tell them that there cannot be three persons in one God, and so they fall back upon the "divine element."

Others maintain that there was nothing divine at all in Christ; that He was man, although endowed with higher powers than any other man. In the words of Herod, they say that mighty works shew forth themselves in Him.

Others, whilst denying our Lord's divinity, deny also His power

of working miracles, and say that He was a man, possessing a very profound insight into the mysteries of nature, and this enabled Him to perform many wonderful works.

Others declare that the chief thing in Christ was not His power, but the nobility and purity of His character. They look upon Him as a sinless man, and our great example in leading a good life and doing good works.

Others again deny that He was sinless, and maintain that He was guilty of little weaknesses and mistakes, though to a less degree than others, so that, in spite of His faults, He is still a noble example for us.

Finally there are some who actually pronounce Him to have been a great sinner, a charlatan, who pretended to be God's only begotten Son, whilst He was really nothing of the kind, and who professed to have divine powers that He did not possess.

Therefore, amongst men of the present day, as amongst the Jews of old, many different replies are given to the question, "What think ye of Christ?"

This is because people still continue to ask counsel of "flesh and blood," which can never reveal the truth. A great many try to arrive at some opinion regarding Christ by thinking, studying and reasoning for themselves; they boldly make assertions that are perfectly worthless, since they are guided only by their own intellect. From time to time they become aware of the weakness of their arguments, but cannot resolve to seek the answer to the question from any authority superior to flesh and blood, and therefore they never are at peace, for the human heart cannot rest until it has an answer on the subject of Jesus Christ.

Whence are we to obtain this answer? One thing is certain—nothing has ever occupied the thoughts of men so much as the

question: "What think ye of Christ?" Attempts may be made to disregard it, and most conflicting answers have been given to it, but still the question faces us, and cannot be ignored. Even those who deny its importance cannot help discussing it, and this alone is a proof that they are forced to consider it. It is indeed the most important of all questions, since upon the answer given to it depends our salvation. It is a vital matter to know what we think of Christ. When St. Peter made his confession, our Lord said to him: "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jona; because flesh and blood hath not revealed it to thee, but my Father, who is in heaven." Flesh and blood can no more reveal to us than to St. Peter what we ought to believe concerning Christ. We, too, can learn this only from our heavenly Father. A question of such vital importance, upon which depends our eternal happiness or misery, must be answered from above; it is vain to ask men to decide it.

We must therefore have recourse to our heavenly Father. How is this to be done? Fanatics and visionaries declare that God speaks through His Spirit directly to their hearts, and reveals to them what they ought to think of Christ. Thousands of such people have come forward at different times, proclaiming various opinions. Each professes to be guided by God's Spirit, but they contradict, hate and persecute one another. Their doctrines must be false for this very reason, as it is inconceivable that our heavenly Father should inculcate contradiction, hatred and persecution. These things proceed from flesh and blood, not from God, and when such teachers try to persuade themselves and others that they are inspired by God, they are obviously mistaken.

Human beings require something firm and visible, to which they can cling with confidence. Otherwise they are apt to confuse thoughts suggested by flesh and blood with thoughts inspired by

God. We should be thankful that we, Catholics, possess something firm, visible and perfectly trustworthy to which to adhere. We have, namely, God's revelation to the Apostles, which they have handed down to us. They left us the Bible, and we learn from it what we ought to believe and confess about Jesus Christ. This statement is correct as far as it goes; but if it means that every individual is free and able to interpret the Bible as he thinks right, it is unsatisfactory, and those who make it are not much better off than those who fancy that God's Spirit speaks directly to their hearts, for the Bible is understood and interpreted in a vast number of different and contradictory ways. There is no unanimity of opinion regarding points upon which our salvation depends, and not only regarding matters of less importance. Some assert, and others deny, that the Bible teaches anything definite on the subjects of the Trinity, original sin, the divinity of Christ and the Atonement. Anything and everything is found in the Bible by honest and learned men, as well as by the ignorant and superficial, and we are driven to the conclusion that God cannot intend to teach us to know Christ simply by means of the Bible and nothing else.

Jesus Christ founded and bequeathed to us an Apostolic Church, which existed before the Apostles wrote anything. Centuries passed before their works were collected and made into one volume for the instruction of the faithful. The collection was made by the Catholic Church, but, after it was formed, a long time elapsed before the invention of printing made it possible for the Bible to be widely circulated, and even now it is far from being in the hands of every individual. If it were God's will that we should learn to confess Christ through the Bible and Bible only, deriving, each of us, his information directly and solely from the revelation that it contains, then indeed have all our forefathers been in evil case.

People talk of "the Bible only." But which Bible do they mean? The Bible was written originally partly in Hebrew, partly in Greek. Comparatively few amongst us can read these two languages, and consequently few are in a position to criticize the accuracy of our translations. Fewer still have received the training requisite to enable them to determine the correct readings of the original text. In the New Testament alone there are about 50,000 variant readings. How many people are capable of discriminating between them? If we could learn what we are bound to believe and confess, only from the Bible alone, by a direct and independent study of the original text, most men would indeed be in a pitiable condition. But, thank God, this is not the case. Jesus Christ Himself founded His Church on earth, and she collected the books of the Bible, she has ever guarded the purity of its text, and caused careful translations to be made. She can expound the Bible, for she was commissioned to do so by our Lord, who promised to teach her all truth (John xvi, 13), and He established her to be the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim. iii, 15). Hence we may safely trust the Church to guide us to a knowledge of Christ, and when we say that we learned this from the Bible, we invariably mean the Bible as interpreted by the Church.

If we resolve to learn in this way, which is the only one sanctioned by God, we shall be entitled to apply to ourselves the words that our Saviour addressed to St. Peter: "Blessed art thou; because flesh and blood hath not revealed it to thee, but my Father who is in heaven."

SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

TRUE JUSTICE

"I tell you, that unless your justice abound more than that of the Scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."—Matt. v, 20.

I. Justice—injustice. How much do these words convey! Yet we often utter them without thinking of their profound significance. We are unjust, that is to say, we are sinners. These words are easy enough to pronounce: We are sinners. It almost seems as if we accepted the fact as inevitable, as if every creature were bound to be a sinner, and therefore the state of sinfulness, being universal, were not so very bad after all; though it may be sad, it appears to be at least excusable.

Christ and the Apostles did not share this opinion. They spoke often of injustice, because they were aware that it is an immeasurable evil, and the source of all our misery. That few people recognize their own injustice becomes manifest as soon as they are charged with any fault or sin. In nine out of ten cases the person accused either denies or excuses his guilt, and pleads that he was not to blame. Where a man's guilt is obvious, and even when no serious offence has been committed, he will not hesitate to lie, and to deny his injustice. If you were to keep a strict watch over your thoughts for one single day, you would soon discover how many of them are holy. If you were to examine your emotions and impulses, you would soon find out whether they are altogether creditable. How many of your words are the outcome of a pure, straightforward disposition? How many of your works proceed from real love of God and your neighbor? Are you striving to secure money

and comforts for yourself, or to promote God's glory and the welfare of your fellow creatures? If you returned an honest answer to these questions, you would have to confess that all your thoughts, words and works are more or less stained with sin, impurity and injustice.

Carry your self-examination a step further, and ask yourself what is the cause of your uneasiness of mind, and of your lack of true peace and happiness. Many and perhaps all of your troubles are due to your moral shortcomings.

If men could only realize the profound injustice of their hearts and mode of life, they would never rest until they had found the way of justice; in other words, they would become Christians.

II. We *must* be honest in this matter; otherwise we shall always be unhappy, for an evil tree must necessarily bring forth evil fruit. How can we become just?

The Pharisees thought themselves righteous because they led respectable lives and did good works. These things are good and praiseworthy. It is always right to do one's duty, and the Pharisees aimed at something more than the bare fulfilment of the minimum that could be required of them. They practised certain mortifications and accomplished certain works over and above those imposed by the law on the whole Jewish race. Many of them were quite in earnest, and we cannot imagine that Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, Paul and Gamaliel were not good men. Our Lord did not condemn indiscriminately their efforts after justice, as we can see from the words: "Your justice must abound more than that of the Scribes and Pharisees." That is to say, your justice must be greater than theirs; their honesty and respectability were worth something, but they did not go far enough. What was wrong with them? In the first place the Pharisees had no adequate perception of their

own sinfulness, and consequently they did not seriously repent, nor did they pray humbly for forgiveness. In the second place they supposed that their natural powers would enable them to be just, and many of them prided themselves upon these powers and tried to impress others with a sense of their superiority, so that they were simply hypocrites.

What is the right way to pass from injustice to justice? Think how a child acts, who sees that he has been naughty and disobedient. He wants to be good, and knows at once how to set to work. He goes to his father and asks to be forgiven. We learn the same lesson from the publican in the Temple; he prayed, saying: "God be merciful to me, a sinner."

God is always ready to be merciful and to forgive us when we repent. He pardons us especially in the Sacrament of Penance, where we are justified through our Saviour's merits, no matter how great and how numerous our sins have been.

It is surely an indescribable benefit to us that our holy and just God, whose wrath is kindled by sin, and who sees all the wickedness in our hearts, nevertheless can and will forgive us. It is a grace that we can never deserve; it is, however, only the beginning of justification, and woe to him who stops short at the beginning, however fair it may be. He resembles a child, who asks to be forgiven, but does not try to do better in future.

III. The gospel teaches us what Christ really demands of us. He wishes our justice to be genuine righteousness of life; He requires us to cherish no unreasonable anger in our hearts, to condemn nobody, to be ready to forgive our enemies and to seek forgiveness when we have done wrong These are things that we cannot accomplish without a struggle, for they are contrary to human nature. We have to exert ourselves, and seek the help of God's

grace by persevering prayer and the reception of the Holy Sacraments.

But these things, however difficult, are necessary; and our Lord enjoins them so strictly as to threaten those with the "judgment," the "council," and "hell fire," who rely upon being God's children, whilst they do not show Him filial obedience.

Strive, therefore, to purify your hearts and sanctify your lives by good works and a conscientious discharge of all your duties. Otherwise to you too will be applicable the threat contained in the Gospel, and you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. But on the other hand beware of relying upon your natural power to attain unto justice. We must err in neither direction, if we wish to avoid self-deception, and to become really just. God's grace must do its work within us, and we must labor faithfully to cooperate with it; both these things are indispensable before we can be truly just in the sight of God.

EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

"I HAVE COMPASSION ON THE MULTITUDE"

"In those days again when there was a great multitude, and they had nothing to eat; calling his disciples together, he saith to them: 'I have compassion on the multitude, for behold they have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat.'"—Mark viii, 1, 2.

I. "I have compassion on the multitude." These words were uttered by our Saviour when He beheld the crowd gathered around Him in the wilderness. We generally regard His words as something permanent and unchanging, not as spoken with reference only to one occasion, nor as the expression of a casual thought or impression. Our Lord is the same yesterday, to-day and forever, and consequently His compassion remains always the same, and from the depths of His sacred Heart He sympathizes with all who suffer.

Does not our experience prove the truth of this statement? It often does so quite unmistakably. People sometimes lose all their possessions, and stand, like the multitude of old, having nothing to eat, with their children crying for food. In their distress they lift up their hearts in fervent prayer to God, and He hears and helps them, as no other helper can do, and so they feel that the Lord has had compassion on them.

II. In the case of others God's help is less apparent. Their misery is very great and seems to have no end; they pray again and again, day after day, year after year, and cry: "Lord, save us, we perish." Yet no help comes, and God does not answer their prayers. Has He not heard them? or has He ceased to feel compassion? They look for one to comfort them, and find none.

Under such circumstances it is no easy task to offer consolation; still less easy is it to find consolation for oneself. We can only say to one suffering thus: "If the Lord tarry, yet wait for Him; He will surely come with comfort and help at the time that He knows to be best. Above all things trust Him and His love; He wishes to purify and sanctify you by letting you suffer."

On one occasion I made a remark of this kind to a woman who had lost her husband and all her children, and she replied: "No, I cannot believe that God wishes to purify and sanctify me. My sorrow makes me worse, not better. I have prayed in vain for so long that I cannot believe in God's mercy any more; I have lost all faith and hope in Him. I cannot and will not continue to pray to a God, who either does not hear me, or who refuses to have mercy upon me. He certainly has no compassion on me, and therefore, I cannot believe in Him. My troubles have hardened me; they have done me no good."

This poor woman was in a fearful condition, but there is perhaps a still more intense form of misery. It is felt by those in spiritual darkness, whose souls are deprived of their daily bread and are exposed to the assaults of their deadly enemy. They cannot discover God's will, and although they pray: "Teach me to do Thy will"—no light comes to them; their darkness is unbroken. We like to see God's will clearly, and so we pray: "Perfect Thou my goings in Thy paths"—we wish to perceive the paths, not to have them hidden. We desire that God should hear us, and when trouble overtakes us we cry: "Bow down Thy ear to me; make haste to deliver me"; and yet God seems deaf to our petitions, nor does He stretch out His powerful hand to help us.

Our souls long for peace, and we exclaim: "Who will give me wings like a dove, and I will fly away and be at rest?"—but never-

theless as a rule the strength is not given, and we can hardly help being swallowed up in the vortex of despair.

We call upon God and ask Him why He withholds His light; surely it would be pleasing to Him that we should see and follow His paths; but the darkness continues. We remind our Saviour that He said of old: "If I send the multitude away fasting, they will faint on the way," and we ask Him if He will let us perish of exhaustion; but no answer comes, and we are on the verge of despair, Some amongst us may have strayed far from their Father's home, but are now converted by prayer and penance, and hunger for the daily bread of their souls, and know not where to find it. Their need is very great, and yet they experience no help; what are they to do?

III. How can we account for God's apparent unwillingness to hear us? We ought to believe that His thoughts and ways are as far above ours as heaven is above the earth, and although we may not in the least understand why He lets us wait so long, we have no right to grumble, and even should He allow us to suffer more than we do, we cannot complain of God's injustice, because we are sinners. All that we have to bear is a punishment for our sins, and the penalty is always less than, never in excess of, our deserts. Sorrow may be intended to test us, and those who suffer most have still good cause to thank God for His mercy. We ought to believe that a night of tears is followed by a morning of rejoicing for all who have learned how to mourn over their sins and to rely upon God's mercy.

When all is dark around them, some people make the mistake of supposing that it is useless to pray, or else that it is an impossibility. Consequently they give up prayer and cease to receive the Sacraments, thus behaving like sick persons who refuse to see a physician

and to take the remedies prescribed. It is most important that we should not let our troubles make us abandon our usual prayers, or abstain from the means of grace prescribed and recommended by the Church. Prayer and the Sacraments are indispensable to every sufferer, no matter whether he feels drawn to them or not. If you cannot pray in words, you can at least cry out to God for help. We find most beautiful and encouraging words in Holy Scripture and in the prayers of the Church, and we should use them, when speech fails us. Even if God's word seems no longer to ring true, listen to it more attentively than ever; and let no temptation to unbelief, no sense of your own unworthiness, and no disinclination keep you away from the Sacraments. Receive them better and with more careful preparation than usual.

If we act thus we shall experience the truth of the old saying: "God has His own times for action and for delay"—we shall learn that when our need is greatest, grace is given most abundantly, and that our Lord still has compassion on the multitude.

NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

THE TREE AND ITS FRUIT

"Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit, and the evil tree bringeth forth evil fruit. –Matt. vii, 17.

I. An evil tree is known by its evil fruits, and the evil fruit on the tree of human life consists of wicked words and deeds. A man may express such noble sentiments that you would imagine him to be a model of purity and goodness, but Satan knows how to assume the form of an angel of light and to utter words of wisdom. As soon however as there is any question of charity towards one's neighbor, of self-sacrifice and of genuine honesty, a man's real character is revealed and his sanctity is often seen to exist merely in word and not in deed, for his true disposition does not agree with his profession of virtue, and betrays itself in bad, selfish, ungenerous and dishonest actions.

Some people maintain that sin is a trifle, provided that we have faith, since God regards our faith and not our works. A living faith is, however, incompatible with a Godless life; it is as impossible for the two to be reconciled as it is for men to gather grapes from thorns or figs from thistles. Our Lord's words, recorded in to-day's Gospel, show that some day He will examine the tree of our life, and if He finds nothing but evil fruit upon it, He will hew it down and cast it into the fire. Although we may not consciously go so far as to suppose that sin does no harm to a believer, we may gradually fall into the habit of making no use of faith and grace, whilst our hearts grow callous and our lives are sinful and corrupt. If

the Judge should examine a tree in this condition, He would condemn it; faith alone would not satisfy Him.

Among evil fruits we must include bad words as well as bad actions; for our Lord tells us that we shall have to give an account of them. Blasphemous remarks, impure conversations and frivolous gossip are bad words in the usual sense, but we must not overlook uncharitable speeches, not merely because they betoken an uncharitable disposition, whereas love is the fulfilment of the law (Rom. xiii, 10), but also because they do so much harm. An uncharitable word, uttered in an unguarded moment of excitement, may give rise to estrangement and hostility, and eventually even to hatred.

Nothing grows so quickly as a weed, and nothing springs up more readily in our hearts than a spirit of anger. The man whom you have injured by your careless words will in his turn injure others, and so the evil has no end. "The tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things; behold how small a fire, what a great wood it kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity" (James iii, 5, 6). If we think over these truths, we shall understand why our Lord said: "By thy words thou shalt be condemned" (Matt. xii, 37).

II. A good tree is known by its good fruit, and the good fruit on the tree of human life consists of good words and works. To a certain extent it is possible for a hypocrite to utter fair words and to lead a blameless life, but it is extremely difficult for him to keep it up, and as a rule his words and actions do not accord with one another; since an evil tree cannot bear good fruit. People are very apt to be misled by appearances, and much harm is done when a wretched hypocrite is mistaken for a good man, though it is still more disastrous, and a serious offence against charity, to consider a true child of God to be a worthless and frivolous character.

If a man is pure and upright both in his language and in his mode of life, it is our duty to regard him as a follower of God, because an evil tree cannot bear good fruit. It is true that God alone is able to survey all our innermost thoughts and intentions, and ultimately it is for Him, and not for us, to judge. It is very probable that at the last great day of reckoning many will see to their surprise that they have been deceived by wretched hypocrites, and many will be overwhelmed with shame for having thought evil of God's faithful servants, and for having rashly condemned those with whom they were not worthy to associate.

III. What ought we to do in order to bear good fruit? We are like wild olives that must be ingrafted into the good and fruitful tree (Rom. xi, 17). Christ is the tree, and all His disciples are branches. We were ingrafted into Him at our baptism, and if any of us subsequently become dry and barren branches, the union between us and our Saviour must be renewed. This reunion is effected by repentance and sorrow for sin, by asking forgiveness of our heavenly Father and receiving it in the Holy Sacrament of Penance, where new life is given to the soul, and this life is increased and strengthened by our Redeemer when He gives Himself to us in the most holy Sacrament of the Altar. Holy Communion is the most perfect union of a believer with Jesus Christ (John vi, 57, etc.). When we, the branches, are once more united with our Lord, we shall bear fruit to His honor, both in our words and in our works. Yes, it will be to His honor, for His life within us produces the fruit, as does the sap flowing from the stem into all the branches. Therefore the honor is His, and not our own. Praised be Jesus Christ. Amen.

TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

A STANDARD FOR APPRAISING THE VALUE OF LIFE

"And the Lord said: 'Who is the fruitful and wise steward, whom his lord setteth over his family, to give them their measure of wheat in good season?'" —Luke xii, 42.

I. Success is the standard whereby most people judge the value and happiness of their lives. If a man is endowed with good abilities and abundant means, and makes a wise use of both, he is successful, and everyone looks upon him as clever, energetic and industrious. At the close of his life he sees that he has accomplished much that will benefit others as well as himself; his fellow countrymen admire and respect him, and it seems impossible that God should not esteem him and his achievements very highly. It is taken for granted that he is a very worthy and a very happy man, and he is loaded with honors in life and after death.

Of course the multitude may be right in their opinion; their judgment regarding him may be the same as God's, and the man may be as happy as they imagine. In any case he has accomplished an honorable task and made a good use of his talents and opportunities. He has spared no effort to do what he thought important, and it cannot be denied that this, like every other good action, is pleasing to God. Moreover, it brings with it a kind of happiness and contentment that are far more solid than any afforded by sensual delights. It is quite possible, therefore, for a successful man to be happy and honorable.

It is, however, equally possible for him to be a rogue and utterly miserable. This will be the case if he has aimed all his efforts at acquiring riches, or worldly honors and reputation, or an influential

position in society, or some other purely temporal object, and has cared nothing for God's glory, or for the welfare of his neighbors. A most successful man may be a pitiable scoundrel, although he has won a great name and is applauded by thousands; for the multitude seldom take the trouble to form an independent opinion; they are like the inhabitants of Ephesus, who cried: "Great is Diana of the Ephesians," not knowing why they did so, but each being carried away by those around him. It is not necessary for me to prove to you that a successful man is not always good and upright; and how can we assume that God values our work according to the measure of success that we achieve? Is it reasonable to suppose that He is guided by this standard in assigning happiness for time and for eternity? No; it is impossible to think that God cares about our success, and consequently we are forced to believe that there is some other standard determining the value and happiness of each individual. To-day's Gospel teaches us what it is.

II. God is guided by our fidelity, not by our success; His judgment differs altogether from that of the world. A man may have abilities and means at his disposal, and he may labor honestly and industriously, but always with very little or no success. He toils to serve God and to do his duty in the station assigned to him, and yet, for some reason or other, he never attains to what the world regards as success. His life abounds in disappointments, rather than in good results.

In such a case as this the world sets no value at all upon the man's industry and fidelity to duty; it looks only at achievements, and when it perceives none, it feels nothing but contemptuous pity. It looks coldly and unsympathetically upon an honest worker, whose one thought is to serve God and do his duty, and it fawns upon a wealthy scoundrel, who is thoroughly corrupt, but who has found

out how to arrive at brilliant results. The superficial minds of the multitude can appreciate these results, and so all with one accord join in extolling them.

The wealthy scoundrel is far lower in the sight of God than is the faithful laborer who does all his work for His sake. The latter, not the former, will enter into the joy of his Lord. His efforts may seem to have been all in vain, but his failure is only apparent, for no one works in vain who works for God. A faithful servant believes this truth, and amidst all his troubles and want of success he experiences consolation and happiness, such as a selfish man, aiming at his own aggrandisement, never enjoys. He knows that he is in God's grace and pleasing to his Master, who cares nothing for the favor and applause of the world. Perhaps you seem to have accomplished nothing in life, to have suffered incessantly and to be no good to anyone—if you have endured all this in a spirit of humility, patience and obedience, you have, in the sight of God, done good work; and if you continue faithful to the end, you will enter into the joy of your Lord; not because you have been successful, but because of your fidelity. The world is often wrong in its estimates; men frequently make much of some miserable favorite, and neglect, despise and trample upon God's faithful servants, who go their way quietly, unnoticed by others and desiring only to be allowed to stand on the threshold of God's house here below, although hereafter they will be admitted as heirs to their Father's home in heaven, for such is the reward promised to fidelity. Therefore, be ye faithful unto death!

ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

CERTAINTY AND FEAR

"Simon Peter answered him: 'Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.'"—John vi, 69.

I. It is most desirable for us to feel assurance regarding our salvation, since to doubt would be a mark of want of confidence in God and His promises, as well as in grace, in Christ and in the Gospel. Such assurance is possible only if we rely with absolute confidence upon God's promises given in the Gospel, and are satisfied regarding our spiritual condition and its permanence. Is it an unerring sign of humility for a man to be always cheerful and free from anxiety? Is it not a proof that he relies only on grace, not on himself? We often hear harsh criticisms passed upon worthy people who are by no means free from anxiety about their spiritual state and their own perseverance. They cannot always be cheerful because they often feel alarm, and are really working out their salvation with fear and trembling, being glad if they can retain what St. Peter calls "a lively hope." Such people as these will appreciate to-day's Gospel, but it will not appeal to those who feel absolute confidence in their own safety.

II. As a rule Holy Scripture does not encourage us to be overconfident of being in the state of grace, and to-day's Gospel contains an emphatic warning against assurance which stimulates humility, but really is due to superficiality and want of thought, and is fraught with very grave dangers.

Besides the apostles there were many genuine disciples who had attached themselves to our Lord, but yet they "went back and walked no more with Him." They abandoned their faith and fell

back into their previous state, because of our Saviour's discourse regarding Himself as the Bread of Life. He said: "Except you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, you shall not have life in you" (John vi, 54). "My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed" (v. 56). These words vexed them, and they asked, like the Jews: "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?" They complained that it was a hard saying, and so they forsook Christ.

The same thing happens at the present day. No one can be sure that he will never feel impelled to cavil at God's word and question passages which he does not understand, because they are altogether beyond human comprehension. We must not be over-confident, and in many matters affecting our ultimate salvation God requires us not to rely upon our own intelligence. He asks of us many sacrifices; sometimes He calls upon us to surrender what we love most on earth, just as He bade Abraham offer his only son Isaac, whom he loved, as a holocaust. When such demands are made upon us, we may think them terribly "hard sayings," and they have from time to time caused genuine disciples of our Lord to fall away from Him. Hence we should never be too sure of ourselves.

The Gospel teaches us yet another lesson. Jesus asked the Twelve: "Will you also go away?" and this question moved St. Peter to bear a glorious testimony to his faith: "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life; and we have believed and have known that Thou art the Christ, the Son of God." Are these not magnificent words? They were uttered by Peter, the prince of the apostles, who was always foremost amongst them; and it was to him that our Lord said: "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. xvi, 18). Nevertheless, in spite of all

his faith and love, and in spite of his glorious confession, he fell so low as to deny his Master with oaths and curses. If Peter fell thus, can we trust ourselves to be faithful unto death? St. Peter rose again after his denial and became the rock on which the Church was founded, and finally he proved his fidelity by dying a martyr's death.

There was, however, another apostle, who undoubtedly was at first a good and faithful follower of Christ, for otherwise He would not have called him to the apostolate. Yet he fell to such shameful depths as acutally to betray his Master, who spoke of him as "a devil." Can any one trust himself to persevere in the faith unto the end?

III. St. Peter knew by sad experience that we ought never to be self-reliant; he never forgot his fall, and an old legend tells us that he wept whenever he heard a cock crow. He had learned to pray: "Lead us not into temptation," and St. Paul, though he spoke much of the glorious gift of grace, admonished his followers to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling. These befit us far better than over-confidence. Hence the Gospel says to one who feels sure of his faith and perseverance: "Beware, you are in a dangerous condition, in which many good Christians have fallen to such a depth that they have never risen again. If you are standing, be on your guard lest you fall; and if you abound in happy confidence, do not altogether exclude fear." On the other hand, one who desponds regarding his spiritual condition and his hold upon the faith, and doubts his ability to persevere in future, but who says, like the man in the Gospel, "Lord, I believe, help Thou my unbelief," should take courage and remind himself that with a good and honest purpose he is sure to succeed. His hand may quiver as he stretches it out in quest of

God's grace, but the richest gift is often placed in the hand that quivers most. He trembles, not because he is lacking in faith, but because he is humble and conscious of his own unworthiness and frailty.

IV. But, it may be asked, must a believer necessarily be weighed down by fear and sadness? God forbid! St. Peter had learned to distrust himself and to shed tears of sorrow, and yet he speaks of the happiness of the Christian life. He has been called "the apostle of hope," and he wrote: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy hath regenerated us unto a lively hope in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter i, 3). In this hope he experienced the joy which must suffice us in this life. He felt he same hope and joy as St. Paul, who said: "We glory in the hope of the glory of the sons of God" (Rom. v, 2). With this hope we must rest contented until it gives place to full fruition. No one should anticipate this moment; until the joy of acquisition is bestowed, a lively hope will sustain our happiness and give us strength to persevere.

TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

ASSENT AND REFUSAL

"A certain man had two sons, and coming to the first, he said: 'Son, go work to-day in my vineyard.' And he answering, said: 'I will not.' But afterwards, being moved with repentance, he went. And coming to the other, he said in like manner. And he answering, said: 'I go, Sir,' and went not."—Matt. xxi, 28-30.

I. This parable is drawn from every day life; a father assigns tasks to his sons; one defies him, and refuses to work, but afterwards repents. The other promises to do what his father wishes, but fails to keep his word. We often meet with men who act in both these ways, but our Lord did not intend to describe the attitude assumed by all human beings with regard to God and His holy will. He had in view on the one hand notorious sinners—"publicans and harlots," who seemed very far from the kingdom of God, and, on the other hand, the Pharisees, who professed great zeal in His service. There is of course a third class, consisting of those who hear God's call, respond to it gladly and perform their allotted task. These are good Christians who profess to be followers of our Lord, and live in accordance with their profession, being honest and upright in the sight of all men. There are others again who really desire to be God's children, who do, in fact, belong to Him, but who are weak, and reveal their weakness in all that they do; they are wanting in will-power and in energy, but they are neither wicked nor hypocritical. Such people are often judged most harshly by their neighbors, but we may well hope that in the end they reach their goal. Men set up for themselves a standard by which they criticize their fellow Christians, but their standard is by no means always identical with that of Almighty God. On the last great day

we shall find that He is infinitely more just, and at the same time infinitely more merciful, than we imagined.

Finally there is a fourth class, consisting of those who refuse to answer God's call, who never repent and who die impenitent.

II. Some people declare that they are eager to hear God's voice, but they do not obey it, and fail to do His will. Notice what kind of call is meant. It is not an invitation to lead an easy life, to bask in the sun of God's grace, and to do nothing requiring any exertion. The father orders his sons to go and *work*. The point is therefore whether they are obedient or disobedient to God's will and commandment.

Two classes of men answer professing their readiness to do God's will. A great many people lead a colorless, indolent existence. They have grown up among Christian surroundings and under the influence of Christianity; outwardly they drift with the tide, and, as far as an onlooker can judge, they intend to do right. Perhaps they profess themselves Christians, and may even talk about God's grace, meaning the grace that covers a multitude of sins. They misuse this grace however by making it an excuse for an easy life, in which there is no serious resistance to sin and no real effort to work out their salvation. They know little or nothing about the grace that helps us to walk before God in newness of life, nor do they concern themselves about the commandments, forgetting that our Lord said: "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me" (John xiv, 21). "Go work, *work* in my vineyard." They have no idea of keeping God's commandments or of doing their duty, and are quite content to say that it is impossible, never thinking that it would be very strange if He had given us a law, and required us to observe it, although He must have been aware that we could do nothing of the kind. Weaklings of this class plead

that grace makes up for all deficiencies, and so they do not exert themselves.

There is another class of those professing to be ready to do God's will, but they are hypocrites, and whilst they say "Yes," in their hearts they mean "No." Outwardly perhaps they seem ready enough to do it, but there are various ways of saying "Yes" and "No." Those belonging to the other class are often honest people after their own fashion; but hypocrites are not honest. They talk loud and long of the necessity of conversion—only they put off being converted; they say that we ought to live for God—only they resolve to continue a little longer living for the world, its pleasures, honors and possessions; they tell us that we must follow the narrow way,—but they go on walking along the broad road. Of course they purpose to do better presently, and to be converted; but meantime they are hypocrites. Their hypocrisy is peculiarly repulsive if they seek to impress others with their goodness and piety, and never consider what they must be in God's sight. They say "Yes," but only for the sake of standing well in the opinion of their fellow men. The worst kind of hypocrisy however is connected with dead faith. "Faith, if it have not works, is dead in itself" (James ii, 17). Self-righteousness and dead works are not more dangerous than dead faith, for works of any kind require a certain amount of exertion and self-conquest, whereas dead faith is very apt to lead to inactivity and self-deception. It suggests that God looks only at faith, and cares nothing for works and life, which must inevitably be imperfect. Such faith as this leads to hypocrisy, and many have perished, all unaware of their condition. They thought that they were responding to God's call, but they failed to do His will, and so they were lost.

III. The other son in the parable refused flatly to go and work

in his father's vineyard, but afterwards thought better of it, and went.

Men are strange creatures: they defy God, and refuse to hear anything about Him or His commandments, about faith or about Christ and His Church. They choose to live and die in unbelief, as freethinkers, if not as atheists, without God and outside the Church. Yet, after all, the son who refused to do his father's bidding must have silently reproached himself, and have had an uneasy consciousness of his disobedience. Conscience is seldom completely silenced, and we may well believe that from time to time even the boldest atheists hear its voice, for "there is no peace to the wicked" (Is. lvii, 21). In their hearts they cannot altogether be deaf to the father's words: "Go, work to-day in my vineyard,"—become an active member of God's Kingdom, cease to lead that wretched life of sin, that ends in disappointment, not in contentment. Some, it is true, remain obdurate, but others, like the son in the parable, are moved with repentance, and go to the vineyard. We may derive much consolation from these words. If any one dear to you has gone astray, and if you are inclined to despair of him, remember that it is your privilege to hope, as long as life lasts; yes, it is more than a privilege, it is a duty, for the time of grace is not yet over. Even if you have banished the transgressor from the human affection of your heart, love him with the love of Christ, and hope for him, and pray for him. Do not forget that it is recorded of the disobedient son how "being moved with repentance," he went to work in the vineyard.

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

TRUTH AND ITS CONFESSION

"Some therefore of the Pharisees said: 'This man is not of God, who keepeth not the Sabbath.'"—John ix, 16.

Jesus had healed a blind man—thus bearing testimony to the truth that He was sent by God, and proving that He had a right to demand our faith, when He declared Himself to be the Christ, the Son of God. Did the Jews accept His testimony and believe in Him?—We can learn many lessons from the account of the behavior of the Pharisees, of the blind man and of his parents respectively. They represent the attitude adopted by three different classes of people towards the truth and its acceptation.

I. *The Pharisees' evil will.* The miracle had undeniably taken place; every one knew that the man who had been born blind could now see, and that he had received his sight because Jesus spread clay upon his eyes. Our Lord had worked a great miracle publicly. How did the Pharisees behave?—They asked the man how he had received his sight, and he told them the whole story. The occurrence took place on the Sabbath, and the Pharisees were quick to avail themselves of this fact, and argued that Jesus could not be of God, because He did not keep the Sabbath. Can they really have believed their own assertion? It is hardly credible; there were a great many outward observances connected with the Sabbath, but surely they did not suppose it to be wrong to cure a poor afflicted person on that day. Others admitted the fact of the miracle, and asked: "How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles?" The two parties of Pharisees quarrelled on the subject, and their dispute might well have caused the incredulous to reflect. They did not

however desist from their obstinate attempt to shut their eyes to the truth, so they stuck to their argument, and maintained that Jesus could not come from God, since He healed the sick on the Sabbath. Then they went on to deny that the man had ever been blind at all, hoping thus to be able to show that no miracle had taken place. They did their utmost to avoid facing the truth, and yet it was manifest to all around. They called the man who had been blind, and tried to frighten him, so that he should not confess the truth; they called him a disciple of Jesus, and at that time all were in peril who acknowledged themselves to be our Lord's disciples, for whoever confessed Him to be the Messias was expelled from the synagogue, lost all his civic rights as a Jew, and was regarded as having no share in God's promises, being accursed and an outcast. This was the worst misfortune that could befall a Jew. The Pharisees therefore refused to recognize the truth, and used threats in order to deter others from recognizing it. When these threats failed, they had recourse to another expedient, and declared Jesus to be so obscure a person that they did not know whence He came. This was a direct lie, if they really knew anything about Him, and it was easy enough to obtain information. If however, their ignorance was genuine, it only shows how little they cared to ascertain the truth. Their whole line of action reveals their anxiety to shut their eyes to it. The miracle was plain enough to all who were willing to see, but the wickedness of the Pharisees consisted in their refusal to face the truth, and to acknowledge that a miracle had been wrought. Had they acknowledged it, they would have been forced to admit that Jesus Christ was sent by God, and that consequently they were bound to believe His word, since He was the Son of God. They would rather do anything than admit this to be the truth, and the attitude adopted by the Pharisees

resembles that adopted now by men of evil will; the Pharisees were not singular in their behavior. Multitudes in every age refuse to recognize the truth, in spite of miracles testifying to it. Some facts and truths can be proved beyond all possibility of doubt, but men simply reject them, preferring not to be convinced of anything that for some reason or other they dislike.

Everyone of us ought frequently to ask himself: "Is it quite certain that I am prepared to recognize divine truth, and to do with all my might what I perceive to be God's holy will?" We should do well to pray earnestly every day: *Domine, doce me facere voluntatem tuam*—O Lord, teach me to do Thy will. We cannot have a full knowledge of ourselves. David prayed to be cleansed from his secret sins, and in every one of us there lingers a remnant of the desire to "detain the truth of God in injustice" (Rom. i, 18), an innate tendency to resist divine truth, when it makes demands upon us. We are not always aware of these things, and the Pharisees of old may have been equally blind to them; it is quite possible that they were no worse than some of us, who refuse to recognize some divine truth, either because he have some secret natural aversion to it, or because we are afraid of its logical consequences. A man whose will is not altogether honest with regard to the truth, is in great danger.

II. *The cowardly will of the blind man's parents.*—The Jews questioned the parents of the man born blind, asking them if he were indeed their son, and whether he was blind from his birth. So far they had no objection to giving straightforward answers, since they saw no reason for fear. But it was otherwise when they were asked how it was that he had received his sight. This was an awkward question, so they replied: "How he now seeth, we know not; or who hath opened his eyes, we know not; ask himself, he

is of age, let him speak for himself." St. John adds that they spoke thus for fear of the Jews. They refused to commit themselves, and shrank from confessing the truth. Of course they knew that a miracle had been wrought, and their son had described exactly how it had occurred; hence they dared not simply deny it, but they were too cowardly to confess it before men; "for the Jews had already agreed among themselves that if any man should confess Jesus to be Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue." Cowardice sealed their lips; they did not venture to acknowledge the truth, the Pharisees were unwilling to do so. In every age there are many who resemble the blind man's parents, and who are afraid to acknowledge what in their hearts they know to be the truth. They are too cowardly to put an unpleasant truth into words; they are afraid to give offence or to see angry looks, and so they are silent, although by speaking boldly they might save a soul. They do not protest against prevalent vices, wide-spread abuses or deeply rooted prejudices, although their protest might benefit society; they do not wish to risk the loss of position or possible advantage. They are too cowardly to profess their faith in the Church of Christ boldly and without reserve, however much good they could do to the Church if they spoke in her defence. No, they are afraid of being put out of the synagogue. Have I spoken too harshly?—I think not; many of us have good reason to ask ourselves whether we are really free from human respect in all its forms.

III. *The good will of the man born blind.* In contrast to the evil will of the Pharisees and to the cowardice of his own parents, the man who had been blind displayed a really good will, and was ready to confess, as well as to acknowledge the truth.

He felt no doubt about the miracle, and he knew that there was danger in proclaiming it before the bitter enemies of Jesus Christ,

for they were sure to turn their hostility against him too. Nevertheless he did not hesitate to pronounce Jesus a prophet, and afterwards he argued that our Lord must be a servant of God and not a sinner, as otherwise He could not have performed so wonderful a work. "From the beginning of the world it hath not been heard that any man hath opened the eyes of one born blind." Finally the man declared openly his belief in Christ as the Son of God; moreover he fell down publicly in the sight of the Jews and adored Him, thus giving the strongest possible evidence of his faith. This man possessed true courage, and we may certainly say that he made a noble confession of faith, regardless of public opinion, and of the powerful men whom he made his bitter enemies by his courageous action. We must not extol any human being too highly. This man certainly knew that he would become an outcast from among his own people; he had to tread the thorny path of exile and taste for a time the bitterness of solitude. Yet even exile and solitude have joys incomprehensible to the world, which can never appreciate them at their true value. There is no loneliness for one who has been admitted to the Communion of Saints; hence he who has no friends here below, will have many above; they are already stretching out their hands to welcome him to his heavenly home.

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

THE LAW OF CHARITY

"A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another, as I have loved you, that you also love one another."—John xiii, 34.

I. The chief and most important thing that our Saviour asks of His disciples is love. He proclaimed that no one was worthy of Him who loved anybody or anything more than Him. He taught that the first and greatest commandment requires us to love God above all things, and the second bids us love our neighbor as ourselves. In to-day's gospel we are told that Christ's followers ought to be known by their love for one another. Therefore love—love of God and our neighbor—is the greatest thing in the world; God demands it of us, and it confers upon human existence all the value, happiness and beauty that it possesses.

St. Paul taught precisely the same doctrine; he spoke of faith, hope and charity as the three principal virtues, adding: "The greatest of these is charity" (1 Cor. xiii, 13). In another place he writes: "The end of the commandment is charity from a pure heart and a good conscience" (Tim. i, 5). And again: "Love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom. xiii, 10). "Charity," says St. John, "is of God, and everyone that loveth is born of God" (1 John iv, 7). "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not, abideth in death." (1 John iii, 14). Love is so great, so all-important because God is love; He is in His essence charity. This doctrine concerning charity raises Christianity far above all other religions, all pious emotions, and all human philosophy. Yet no word is perhaps more frequently misused and misunderstood than the word love, and no divine

commandment is so often misinterpreted as that which bids us love God and our neighbor.

II. *Faith and love.* Every Christian ought to acknowledge at once that love is the most precious thing in human life; the voice both of conscience and of experience tells us that nothing surpasses the happiness of loving and being loved. A life abounding in love is the fairest that this world can offer, whereas a loveless existence is devoid of all joy. and is acknowledged to be bad and miserable by every one possessed of common sense and true moral feeling. A man may be rich, handsome, talented and famous, but if he really loves no one and has no one to love him, he is unspeakably wretched. We can better dispense with everything than with love. It seems almost unnecessary to make this remark, as it is so obviously true, and yet even amongst professing Christians there are some whose inner life is so unhealthy, barren and dreary, that they fail to appreciate the value of love.

In many cases their attitude of mind is due to a mistaken view of the teaching of Holy Scripture regarding faith. They separate faith from charity, whereas in the Bible they are closely united. It is true that "without faith it is impossible to please God" (Hebr. xi, 6), that "man is justified by faith without the works of the law" (Rom. iii, 28), and that we obtain remission of our sins through faith in Jesus Christ. But Holy Scripture also tells us that charity is the fruit of faith; we must believe in God before we can love Him, and to some extent we must believe also in men, before we can love them. Faith must therefore precede charity, but it does not follow that faith is greater than charity; in fact no one can maintain that it is so without contradicting St. Paul's statement: "The greatest of all is charity." Still less ought we to conclude that faith alone gives its value to human existence in the

eyes of God and of men; yet many make the mistake of asserting this to be the case, and maintain a life full of devoted charity, rich in good results, to be no better than a life of sin and impiety. They arrive at this conclusion because they suppose faith alone to have any value in God's sight. In this way they reject as worthless what is really the greatest thing in life, and they believe salvation to depend upon faith that is dead and without value. Thus the distinction between right and wrong, good and evil is obliterated. The faith which God requires is living, not dead, and without love faith cannot live, since living faith is the beginning of love. Faith and charity are inseparable.

III. But how can it be a *duty* to love? How can God *command* us to love Him and our fellow men? Is it possible to love because it is our duty, and because we are ordered to do so?—This is a very important question, which we cannot answer unless we know what is meant by love. People imagine love to be merely an emotion, or at least chiefly an emotion, good and beautiful in itself, and pleasant to experience. Hence they conclude very reasonably that we cannot be required as a duty to feel an emotion. It is useless to order one person to feel ardent affection for another, and it is equally useless to say: "Thou *shalt* love God." We cannot control our feelings; they come of their own accord, and if love is only or chiefly a matter of emotion, the commandment of love is most unreasonable; and there is no sense at all in Christianity. In other words, failure to understand this point leads men to give up all profession of Christianity, which lays such stress upon the importance of love.

I once heard a lecture on charity, and the lecturer alluded to the difficulty that I have mentioned. Every one must certainly desire to have a satisfactory solution of it, but the one proposed by this Protestant lecturer was most unsatisfactory; it amounted to this:

"We are incapable of arousing within us the emotion which constitutes the essence of love, but God can and will produce it in our hearts, provided that we pray earnestly for it." What consolation is there for one who has prayed earnestly without receiving this gift? He finds it impossible to feel for God what he feels for his parents and friends, and though he has prayed for the gift of sensible affection, it has not been bestowed. He is therefore deficient in something indispensable to salvation, and at a loss how to obtain it.

The lecturer was obviously making a mistake; God never refuses to help anyone who is honestly striving to obey His commandments. There must be another and more satisfactory solution to the problem, and after all it is easy enough. The former conclusion was wrong, because it was deduced from false premises, and as Christians we are bound to argue thus:—Christianity commands us to love God and our neighbor, consequently love is a duty, and the feeling of affection cannot be the only, or even the chief thing in love. True love is never perhaps totally devoid of all emotion, and we can see from the lives of the saints that they *felt* love; but at the same time what is really important is the will, since nothing can be imposed upon us as a duty which is not dependent upon our will. The will is the strongest of our spiritual powers, and determines our responsibility for our actions. A love consisting of emotions is not a moral force; it does not protect us against selfishness and is frequently quite untrustworthy. We speak of people as being in love, and very often their fancy for one another passes away, just because it is a feeling, and nothing else. It has nothing to do with the will, and possesses no moral value. The same may be said of some kinds of friendship. Some people are very enthusiastic in their devotion to their friends or in their zeal for some occupation.

For a time they are ready to do and sacrifice anything, but after a while it appears that much reliance cannot be placed on them. It is impossible to depend upon what is a mere matter of sentiment; we need a mature and resolute will.

True love is a moral force, and it is trustworthy. It would be well if this fact were taken to heart by all who boast of the ardor of their affections, simply because their feelings are quickly aroused. They might learn a wholesome lesson from reflecting upon what will afford consolation to many worthy Christians who are dismayed and troubled by the law of charity. These latter have to confess that they do not experience the feeling which they imagine to be necessary, if they are to obey the law; they know however that they possess the will to fulfill the two-fold command to love God and their neighbor. Let them take comfort, for this will is the love required of them. Love consists in discharging the duty of obedience to God's will and commandment; for, as our Lord says: "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me" (John xiv, 21). This being so, we can understand why it is a duty imposed upon us to love God; and we can understand also that no one, who honestly desires to fulfill this duty, need despair, or think that it is beyond his power to do so.

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

THE VALUE OF EARTHLY POSSESSIONS

"Lay not up to yourselves treasures on earth, where the rust and moth consume, and where thieves break through and steal."—Matt. vi, 19.

To-day's gospel is part of the Sermon on the Mount; in which, after instructing His disciples regarding alms-giving, prayer and fasting, our Lord goes on to speak of the value of earthly possessions.

I. His argument is this:—Do not strive to heap up earthly possessions, but make it your aim to acquire heavenly riches; otherwise your heart will cling to what is temporal, instead of seeking what is eternal, and you will suffer greatly in consequence. You will render yourself thoroughly miserable, and be like a blind man groping in darkness. Our Saviour thus teaches us in a few words how we ought to regard earthly riches. There are two totally different ways in which men look upon them.

II. Some people consider earthly possessions to be the one thing needful, and of the utmost importance. Christians ought to recognize the fact that the world at the present day takes this view. Worldliness is a great force, and it assumes many various forms. The age in which we live, more perhaps than any other period, is characterized by a worldly spirit, with which everything is infected, —all our science, art, literature, politics and amusements,—nothing is free from worldliness. It is as a rule by no means coarse or repulsive; it is in fact often very attractive. Men take great pains to reconcile faith and Christianity with this spirit, and try to show that the religion of Christ is not incompatible with ambition, arro-

gance, pride and sensuality. They wish to serve two masters, and fail. Would that they were capable of seeing the impossibility of what they attempt, before it is too late, and the vanity of all that the world offers becomes manifest. Sooner or later their eyes will be opened, and what will be their plight when everything on which they set so much store decays and perishes? It is hard enough for a Christian to experience the ruin of his earthly happiness for the sake of truth and conscience, and yet to remain steadfast; but he at least knows that he still possesses something infinitely better, whereas, when a worldling has to endure a terrible loss, he is plunged into despair, since he neither knows of nor possesses anything higher than what he has lost. If he does not actually despair, he affects a stony resignation or a dull indifference—in any case a spirit of worldliness leads to misery.

Since external possessions alone have any value in the eyes of the world, the Church is frequently despised. The religion of a nation is estimated almost exclusively according to its intellectual status, its wealth, power, outward display and attractiveness, that is to say, according to a worldly standard. We can understand this attitude of mind in one who considers earthly prosperity, fleeting enjoyments and empty display to be things of priceless value; but it is not easy to account for its existence among those who call themselves Christians, and ought to know that God judges by another standard. He pronounces blessed those who are poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst after justice, and those who are despised and calumniated by men for Christ's sake. It seems hardly possible so thoroughly to misunderstand the gospel of Jesus Christ as to suppose that He intended His Church to be judged and appreciated according to her position and power in the world, and the prosperity of her members.

I once listened to a sermon preached at the funeral of a very rich man. The speaker expressed the hope that God would bestow on the dead man an abundant portion of heavenly grace, since He had given him abundance of riches in this world; and this was also a grace. This line of thought made me wonder whether the preacher disapproved of our Lord's account of Dives and Lazarus.

Having thus briefly considered the value set by the world on earthly possessions, let us go on and study the opposite extreme.

III. Some people speak as if a Christian were bound to repudiate and condemn all earthly beauty, joys and pleasures as being nothing but vanity, and likely to withdraw his heart from God. They require him to renounce as far as possible all that is earthly, temporal and human, to be perfectly detached from all the delights of earth, and to mourn continually over the misery of this life. Such people refuse to see the beauty of this fair world, that God has decked with everything that can charm us and make us happy. They behave like a man who, being melancholy mad, was walking in his garden one lovely morning in May. All around were exquisite flowers and singing birds, but he held his cloak before his eyes, lest he should see the blossoms, and stopped his ears, lest he should hear the birds, for he feared distraction in his melancholy mood. Such people forget that God Himself made the world so fair, and that therefore nothing earthly is evil in itself. Christianity may and does ask us to deny ourselves, but self-denial alone cannot make us Christians, in fact it is actually un-Christian when separated from the other obligations imposed upon us by Christianity. True Christianity ought to enter into the whole life of man, and inspire it with its sanctifying grace. Therefore this cannot be the right way of valuing earthly things.

IV. "Lay not up to yourselves treasures on earth." In these

words our Lord condemns worldliness, but not because the things of this world are in themselves bad and sinful. He does not condemn the possession of riches, if God pleases to bestow them on any one; but to make the acquisition of wealth, no matter by what means, the one great aim of life, is certainly incompatible with our Lord's words. He condemns the spirit of worldliness for two reasons. First, because the things of the world, being poor and transitory, *deceive* a man who sets his heart upon them; and secondly because they *corrupt* him. The condemnation does not apply to those who possess earthly riches "as though they possessed not," that is to say, who do not cling to their wealth as if their whole happiness depended upon it. But it is not easy to possess riches thus, and not to allow them to injure the soul, and therefore our Lord speaks emphatically. Holy Scripture contains many references to the need of self-denial, but this does not mean the distorted kind of renunciation that refuses to see any beauty or goodness in God's creatures. Self-denial that stops short of renunciation of this kind has no value at all, but we are advised to refrain from acquiring temporal possessions, if we practise this self-denial for God's sake, with the intention of promoting His honor and glory and the welfare of His kingdom, and in order to secure our own salvation. From time to time our divine Lord counselled great acts of self-denial. He advised the rich young man to sell all that he had and give the proceeds to the poor; to abandon family life, to renounce his own will, and to become His disciple, and do exclusively His will. The apostles practised self-denial of this kind; they forsook all their worldly goods in order to do Christ's work on earth, and to lay down their lives for Him. Many others have followed their example, and countless men and women in every age have given up all for Christ's sake. They are the heroes and

heroines of the Church, but we are not all called to make such heroic sacrifices.

V. "Lay up to yourselves treasures in heaven." Our Lord teaches us in these words to labor chiefly for what is eternal, and to seek happiness in the hope of future joys. He shows us that in this way we can be happy here on earth, just as the whole body is full of light, provided that the eyesight be good. The world deems it folly to labor for heaven and eternity, since to a worldly mind there is no certainty about either, but it is otherwise with Christians. They are happy, unspeakably happy, even here below. They may suffer great tribulation, and experience the loss of things apparently indispensable; sometimes they endure deep inward pain and sorrow. Occasionally a Christian may feel himself utterly lonely and abandoned; his faith and confidence seem to waver, because he is denied the happiness that God has promised to those who love Him. But if we examine the matter more closely, we shall probably find that his depression and disappointment are connected with a trace of worldliness still lingering in his heart, and he still hankers after the good things of this world. If only we surveyed these things dispassionately, and saw how worthless they are in themselves, we should esteem them at their true value, and rise above all our troubles.

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

TWO MASTERS

"No man can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will sustain the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and Mammon."—Matt. vi, 24.

Very different opinions may be formed regarding the condition of any body of people, according to the point of view taken by the observer. One person may see nothing but what is good, and will say that the attendance at Mass is excellent, great zeal is displayed in frequenting the Sacraments, religious books and newspapers are read in most houses, and considerable interest shown in missions and charitable works,—in short the condition of that congregation leaves little to be desired. Another person on the contrary sees only the dark side, and notices that the members of the congregation in question are avaricious, worldly, vain, self-indulgent, immoral and dishonest; consequently their condition is deplorable. Which critic is right? It is possible that there is some truth in the statement of each; in this world good and evil, light and darkness, are inseparable and the good corn and the cockle grow together in the Church as they do elsewhere.

But what shall we say when we see them inextricably entangled in the life of one individual; when in one and the same heart he worship both God and the devil, and sways to and fro, wavering between good and evil? Many who try to serve two masters, deceive themselves; they are attempting to do what Christ has pronounced impossible.

I. It would not be impossible to serve two masters if they were of the same mind, and desired, ordered and forbade the same things,

or if they claimed our service alternately. But in this case we should really have one master only, since the two would agree and have a common will. A child once said to me: "I can't understand about the two masters. I know a boy who works in the morning for M. A. and in the afternoon for M. B. Is he doing wrong?" Of course not. The two masters of whom our Lord speaks are rulers diametrically opposed in their ideas and wishes, so that one orders what the other forbids. It is plain that no one can serve two masters of this kind, and that he will either love the one and hate the other, or sustain the one and despise the other. To please both is an impossibility, however much he may try to do it.

II. Who are the two masters?—One is God, and the other is Mammon, by which our Lord meant the world. God and the world make claims upon us that are quite irreconcilable. There is one point, however, on which their requirements are identical, viz., each demands our whole and undivided allegiance; but whereas God desires us to advance continually on the way of sanctification, the world wishes to lead us astray and to plunge us into ruin. God wants to lift us up to spiritual freedom, the world seeks to drag us down and make us slaves of the flesh with its lusts and cravings. God shows us the way to peace and charity, the world fills us with selfishness and discontent. In short, God aims at our salvation, and the world at our destruction.

Holy Scripture is very explicit on this point. It bids us "Love not the world, nor the things which are in the world. If any man love the world, the charity of the Father is not in him" (John ii, 15)—"Whosoever will be a friend of this world, becometh an enemy of God" (James iv, 4);—"What participation hath justice with injustice? or what fellowship hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial?" (2 Cor. vi, 14, 15).

III. If men would only make up their minds to serve one master, we should know how they stood. But, as it is, they do their best to serve both. On Sunday morning there is a little piety, and the rest of the week is given up to worldliness. On certain occasions there is some display of honesty, but there is a great deal of dishonesty in everyday life. There is some amount of confidence in God, and exaggerated anxiety about food and clothing. There is sometimes straightforwardness towards God in an hour of quiet reflection, and treachery towards mankind. There is some degree of love of God, coupled with excessive fear of the world's opinion. All these things are symptoms of lukewarmness; and it is written: "Because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will begin to vomit thee out of my mouth." (Apoc. iii, 16). A man who is half-hearted and tepid accomplishes nothing, and that is why our Lord tells us that we must either love or hate our master, either sustain or despise him. We shall do well to examine ourselves by this rule.

IV. This harsh utterance seems likely to alarm us, and many worthy souls have undoubtedly trembled when they applied it to themselves. Is our love of God really so perfect that we feel nothing but hatred and contempt for the world and all that it can offer? If we can reply in the affirmative, we are indeed children of God and heirs of heaven; but if we cannot, we must belong to the class of the lukewarm, whom our Lord "will vomit out of His mouth."

Conscience tells us that our love of God is very imperfect, and so is our hatred of the world. There are many things in the world that we love, in spite of their being wrong and sinful. All the saints have complained of the strength of their affection for worldly things, and in their ears our Lord's words about serving two masters

sounds as a condemnation. It would indeed be such, were the highest degree of love of God and of hatred for the world required of us, under pain of eternal punishment; but this is not the case. God asks of each man that he should love Him with all his soul, with all his heart and with all his strength, and this commandment is obeyed by one who considers it his chief business in life to obey and serve God, although his obedience and service are imperfect. A man who struggles incessantly against the spirit of worldliness in himself and others, shows his hatred of it, although his resistance to it is not always successful. If we examine ourselves honestly, we shall soon find out whether God or the world is the moving principle within us. Our love of God is not to be measured by our feelings, for they are very untrustworthy; the great point is whether we have the will to obey and serve Him; and it is this good will that He demands of us.

When we speak of hating the world, we do not mean the world as created by God; we read in Holy Scripture that God Himself loves it (John iii, 16), and we too ought to love and delight in it as a masterpiece of creation. The world that we should hate is wicked and estranged from God; it is the world of which St. John says (1 John ii, 16) that it consists of the concupiscence of the flesh, and the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life; and love of it is incompatible with love of God. If we are determined to serve God, we must hate the world; and with the aid of divine grace we can acquire both this love and this hatred, if only we are in earnest.

V. It is to His zealous servants that our Lord says: "Be not troubled; anxiety is sinful." Some people, on hearing these words, feel inclined to exclaim that they contain another condemnation, that it is hard for men who work hard to obtain the necessaries of life

to be told that they ought to be as careless as birds, and rely only upon God. Probably most of us have been guilty of over-anxiety. Our Lord bids us look at the lilies of the field in their spotless beauty, exceeding the splendor of Solomon; let us look at them and remember that, in spite of all our wretched sins, Christ has made it possible for us to attain to similar purity, since His justice may become our own. It is acquired by everyone who with true contrition seeks remission of sins in the holy Sacrament of Penance, and it is increased whenever in Holy Communion we participate in our Lord's most holy, just and pure human nature. When we have attained in some measure to this purity of heart, of which the lilies are a type, we shall be ready, like the birds of the air, to raise our voices in praise of God.

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

THE STRENGTH AND THE WEAKNESS OF DEATH

"When Mary therefore was come where Jesus was, seeing Him, she fell down at His feet, and saith to Him: 'Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.'"—John xi, 32.

I. *The Strength of Death.* "Behold, Thou hast made my days measurable, and my substance is as nothing before Thee" (Ps. xxxviii, 6). The span of our earthly life is very short. Think of all the old people whom you knew in your childhood; they have passed away, and now perhaps you are growing old yourselves, and the time is not far distant when you too will pass away. Look back ten years, and recall where you were living and what you were doing then. It does not seem long, and as you grow older, the years fly more and more quickly. Yet in another ten or twenty years perhaps, old age will overtake you; our time is indeed short, and none realize its shortness so fully as do the old, whose course is almost run. "The days of our years are threescore and ten, but if in the strong they be fourscore years, what is more of them is labor and sorrow" (Ps. lxxxix, 10).

What is the force that so inexorably cuts short the life that God gave?—It is the power of death. Our life on earth is not only brief, but full of suffering. Many an old man complains: "What profit shall a man have of all his labor and vexation of spirit, with which he hath been tormented under the sun? All his days are full of sorrows and miseries, even in the night he doth not rest in mind" (Eccles. ii, 22, 23). "I have numbered to myself wearisome nights; if I lie down to sleep, I shall say: 'When shall I arise?' and again I shall look for the evening, and shall be filled with

sorrows even till darkness. . . . My days . . . are consumed without any hope . . . If I say: 'My bed shall comfort me, and I shall be relieved, speaking with myself on my couch, Thou wilt frighten me with dreams and terrify me with visions'" (Job. vii).

Everywhere and always we have to suffer; we grieve over disappointments, over loss of property, the death of those dear to us, the disloyalty of friends and the insults that we have to endure; pain and sorrow accompany us from the cradle to the grave, anxiety turns our hair white and undermines our strength; "Of sadness cometh death, and it overwhelmeth the strength, and sorrow of heart boweth down the neck" (Ecclus. xxxviii, 19). Death is a mighty foe, and pain is the weapon with which he is armed. Our Saviour's heart broke with sorrow, as He said Himself: "My soul is sorrowful even unto death," and the sorrow that killed Him was caused by our sins, so that we see how death exercises his power chiefly by inflicting pain during life.

After the death of Lazarus, his sister said: "Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died"; others however asked: "Could not He that opened the eyes of the man born blind, have caused that this man should not die?" Many in every age have wondered whether He who comforted the afflicted, healed the sick and raised the dead to life, could not have taken away pain, sickness and death altogether. No; He could not; He had indeed all power, but God had once for all ordained that death should be the wages of sin. As long as sin exists, death must continue to exercise his force, with all the pain and sorrow inseparable from him.

It is well for us to satisfy the demands of justice. It is with the hope of future glory that we console ourselves for the miseries of life, but we would fain discover, if it were possible, a ray of light now in the midst of our present darkness. Perhaps we think too

little of suffering as a wholesome and just punishment for our sins; it is good for us to be chastised with pain, sickness and death. "All chastisement for the present indeed seemeth not to bring with it joy, but sorrow; but afterwards it will yield to them that are exercised by it, the most peaceable fruit of justice" (Heb. xii, 11). If we accept suffering in a Christian spirit, we shall gather the glorious fruits that it produces.

II. *The Weakness of Death.* Some people mourn without hope over their dead. The ancient Greeks represented death symbolically as a genius holding an inverted and extinguished torch, typifying the extinction and end of life. This is not the Christian idea of death, and it ought not be engraved on the tomb of one who believes in Christ, since we know that life is not extinguished like a light, and we do not mourn like those who have no hope. The power of death is great, but that of Christ is far greater, and He will eventually triumph over death. He raised the widow's son at Naim, the daughter of Jairus, and His friend Lazarus from the dead, but He did not deliver sinful men from the penalty of death. He wished to display His power to do what will finally take place, when the sting of death is broken, and death itself is swallowed up in victory; for then the dead will be raised again to life.

Is your hope in the future resurrection so strong that nothing can overthrow it? If so, you will behold God's glory even now. This is the experience of all who stand firm in the faith; for though Christ's faithful servants feel the power of death in their mortal bodies, which perish and decay, their inner man is renewed day by day through the victory of the spirit over the flesh; and they know that there is nothing to fear for the future, since "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord" (Apoc. xiv, 13).

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

SELF-EXALTATION AND SELF-ABASEMENT

"Every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."—Luke xiv, 11.

I. *Self-exaltation*—Pride and arrogance are forms of self-exaltation. We have a vivid picture of it in the gospel, where the guests are eager to secure the most honorable places at table. An arrogant person finds it difficult to secure a suitable place at table, in society or in men's esteem, yet, after all, it is not so much the place that matters, as the spirit in which it is occupied. A man, entitled to a prominent position, may occupy it, and still be humble; he has not chosen it for himself, but accepts it simply as his due. On the other hand sometimes the guests can hardly be induced to sit down at all, because each wishes to have the lowest seat; but is this desire an infallible sign of humility? It happens not infrequently that the arrogant man occupies the lowest, and the humble man the highest place.

Arrogance reveals itself in many different ways. The lowest is that described by the Apostle in the words: "Their glory is their shame." There are actually people who boast of their skill in cheating and defrauding others, and who glory in wickedness of every kind. This peculiarity characterizes the age in which we live, and recurs whenever religion is at a low ebb. Others glory in their indifference, and fancy it to be a mark of their superiority if, in consequence of self-indulgence and excess, they have arrived at a real or assumed state of insensibility and indifference to everything. They wish to show that they have tasted everything and no longer relish anything, in fact that all is distasteful and repulsive to them.

We meet these people everywhere, in hotels and restaurants; young men, old before their time, with dull eyes and sunken cheeks; at the age when they ought to be full of energy; they care for nothing, because they have lost all power to use their wills—and they are proud of this fact!

Others boast of their riches,—not of the honest labor with which they have acquired them, but simply of possessing them, and nothing could be more foolish, since ownership is quite unconnected with personal worth. Good looks and fashionable clothes are of the utmost importance in the sight of many, who would do better to reflect that these things will soon pass away, but the adornments of the soul are imperishable. Others think much of their intellectual gifts, and are proud of being good orators, politicians, scholars or artists. Whence did they derive their skill, knowledge and talents? From themselves? No, from God. Therefore the honor is due to Him; all our little learning vanishes when we die, and is forgotten. The greatest statesman, with all his diplomacy, cannot frustrate the last enemy—death. The orator who is more conscious of his eloquence than of his shortcomings, is a vain fool; soon he will be silent in death.

Unbelief is the outcome of arrogance. The word of God seems insignificant, and the Sacraments appear trivial to one who thinks only of their outward form. Christ, as Son of Man, is not an imposing figure, and the Kingdom of God, as it exists on earth, is of no particular importance. But our salvation depends upon our being poor in spirit, and this doctrine is most offensive to the arrogant, and consequently those who are great in their own sight are prone to unbelief. This is why our Saviour said: "How can you believe, who receive glory one from another, and the glory which is from God alone, you do not seek?" (John v, 44). He that

exalteth himself shall be humbled—self-exaltation invariably brings upon itself, even in this world, a punishment, and the arrogant are always discontented, always in search of fresh honors and greater luxury. Under a brilliant exterior profound unhappiness often lies hidden, and this is frequently the case with one who seeks honor among men. He is apt to suffer acutely when any real or imaginary insult is offered him, and frequently we see that a man, who exalts himself, is brought low even in this world, though his final humiliation is reserved for the world to come.

II. *Self-abasement*—Arrogance, as we have seen, consists in thinking much of oneself; humility consists in self-abasement. A humble man has not a very good opinion of himself, so he dwells in the valleys rather than on the heights, where he feels insecure. "Pride goes before a fall"—he does not forget this warning.

Humility is pre-eminently a Christian virtue, for it was unknown to the pagans of old, who had not even a word with which to designate it. The Apostles were obliged to coin a new word, and this fact alone proves that humility is unfamiliar to man in his natural state. A new form of paganism is growing up at the present day, and pride is regarded as a virtue by the writers of this school. The hero or heroine of many modern novels is a vain, worthless creature, decked out with spurious splendor. Our young people read these unwholesome books, and their ideas are grossly distorted by them.

How can we become humble? The question would be superfluous if only we recognized what trivial beings we are. We are merely creatures, part of God's creation. Sometimes we feel our insignificance, as when we gaze at the vast expanse of ocean, or at the peaks and glaciers of the Alps, or at the countless stars in the firmament. Sometimes we perceive our own unimportance, when we consider

our life with all its petty interests and cares, and then reflect that we are but grains of dust, whereas God is infinite, eternal and almighty.

Moreover, we are worthless because we are sinners; we shudder when we hear of terrible convulsions in the world of nature, but far worse is sin, rebellion against God in the spiritual world. We are the rebels, the sinners;—does it not behoove us to be humble?

There is, however, another thought that should humble us yet more, and that is the thought of God's love towards us, His rebellious children. God so loved the world, the rebellious world, that He sent His Son to save us in spite of all our sins. The remembrance of this fact should humble us to the dust.

But after humiliation comes exaltation, for God gives grace to the humble. Even here below He exalts those who believe in His Son, and makes them His children by adoption in the Kingdom of Heaven, bestowing peace and hope upon their restless and despondent hearts. He will exalt them yet more above, for He will say to them, as to the humble servants: "Enter into the joy of your Lord."

NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

EXCUSES FOR UNBELIEF

"And Jesus walked in the Temple, in Solomon's porch. The Jews therefore came round about Him, and said to Him: 'How long dost Thou hold our souls in suspense?' If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly. Jesus answered them, 'I speak to you, and you believe not.'"—John x, 23-25.

I. *Excuses for Unbelief*—"How long dost Thou hold our souls in suspense?" This question suggests great zeal and earnest efforts to ascertain the truth. "If Thou be the Christ, tell us plainly." These words contain a veiled reproach, and an attempt to excuse the incredulity of the speakers, who hint that Christ did not help them in their honest quest of truth, and did not tell them plainly enough whether He was the Son of God. Also He had not performed any miracle in order to convince them. On the side of the Jews there was apparently great eagerness to acquire certainty; on that of Christ there were neither words nor actions calculated to supply it, and under these circumstances the Jews considered themselves quite justified in persisting in their unbelief.

How apt men are to deceive themselves! We need not take it for granted that these Jews intended to tell lies, but they undoubtedly were deceiving themselves, as we see from our Lord's reply. He told them that His words and works clearly revealed Him to be the Messiah. Even the legal officials acknowledged: "Never did man speak like this man" (John vii, 46); but they did not believe. No human being could cure the deaf, the blind, the lame and even lepers, no one else could raise the dead to life by uttering a word,—but the Jews refused to believe. No amount of testimony made

any impression upon them, and therefore their zeal was not genuine at all, and they were deceiving themselves. Their fault was that they had not the will to believe; they were not in earnest about the truth, and their excuse was only an evasion.

Are people at the present day much better than the Jews? We cannot of course pronounce all uncertainty and doubt with regard to Jesus Christ to be the result of an evil will; it is undeniable that both in the past and now there have always been honest men, who doubt in spite of having a good will to seek and discover the truth. It would be unfair to blame either these or another class of people, who have attained to a partial knowledge of the truth, but seem unable to go further. Still there are many at the present time who resemble our Lord's contemporaries, who shut their eyes obstinately to what is an obvious truth, because it does not suit them to believe it. If any truth is opposed to the spirit of the age or to the demands of modern science, they profess themselves incapable of believing it. If you talk about anything that sounds quite up to date, and takes their fancy and flatters their pride, they are ready enough to accept what you say as gospel truth. They would believe anyone who told them that the moon was made of green cheese; they tolerate and even welcome the most outrageous nonsense and the most dangerous errors, provided always that the speaker possesses the art of presenting his views in a plausible fashion.

We must expect such people to offer the most obstinate resistance to plain truth, if it would disturb their wonted opinions, or compel them to reflect and perhaps to acknowledge themselves to have been in the wrong. The worst thing is that they pride themselves on being free from prejudices and ardent lovers of truth; only a few have any suspicion of the force and extent of such fatal self-deception.

Is this self-deception unavoidable? or is it possible to attain to absolute certainty regarding our Lord Jesus Christ, Christianity and the Church? Yes, thank God, it is possible; certainty is within our reach, and will grow stronger and stronger.

II. *Certainty on Matters of Faith*—Jesus Christ said plainly that He was the Son of God, and one with the Father. Some refuse to accept His testimony without proof, and say with the Jews: "Thou bearest witness to Thyself, therefore it is untrue." Surely we shall not follow their example, and make this excuse.

Consider our Lord's life, words and works, His infinite purity, His boundless charity, even towards His enemies; think how He died in indescribable anguish for the sins of men, friends and foes alike, and then tell me if any one more perfect has ever lived on earth. Compare Him with the best and noblest of our race, and you will have to confess that their merits pale beside His glory. Then remember that He, being what He was, said of Himself: "I am the Son of God; I and the Father are one."

I beg you to attend closely to the deduction that inevitably follows:—*Either* our Lord spoke the truth, *or* He was the greatest deceiver that the world has ever known. We must either accept this latter alternative, or, like Thomas, exclaim in adoration: "My Lord and my God."

Jesus Christ was so pure and holy, that He had a peculiar right to bear testimony to Himself, and His testimony is the foundation of our certainty; we may surely believe Him, rather than any one else, when He speaks of Himself.

He refers to His works in support of our belief in His divinity: "The works that I do in the name of my Father, they give testimony of me." "If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not." One single miracle, the raising of one dead man to life, would

suffice to establish His claim to our belief; but His whole life was spent in working miracles, and that their testimony is irrefragable appears from the efforts made by unbelievers to explain them away. We are told that the mysterious light at Bethlehem proceeded from a lantern, left behind by the shepherds; that the feeding of the multitudes in the wilderness never took place; that walking on the water means simply walking beside the water—would the disciples have cried out in fear, thinking that they had seen a spirit, if it was nothing but a man walking on the shore of the lake? Lazarus—although decomposition had set in, was only apparently dead, as was our Lord Himself, in spite of the fact that His Heart was pierced by a lance, etc., etc.

It is impossible for unbelievers to get rid of the miracles wrought by Christ; they compel us to put faith in His words, when He says of Himself: "I am the Son of God; I and the Father are one." They add perfect certainty to our faith.

Our Lord speaks of believers as His sheep, to whom He gives eternal life, and whom no one can pluck out of His hand. They follow Him, not in dead faith, which has no effect on a man's life, but in living faith, submitting to His will in humble obedience. The more they mortify their own will in order to accomplish His will, the happier are they, and the stronger grows their faith in Him who directs their way, so that they increase in assurance and certainty regarding Him in whom they believe. He bestows upon them life everlasting; from His words and Sacraments they derive strength to overcome the world with its trials and sorrows, and this strength comforts and sustains them in life and in death. No man can pluck them out of His hand. History shows us that this is true; nothing has ever succeeded in overthrowing the Church of Christ, not the violence of the secular power, not the ingenious arguments of

scholars, not the shafts of ridicule nor the allurements of sensuality. The Church stood firm, when all around her fell into ruins. Yes, we may be absolutely certain regarding our Saviour. May we be faithful to the truth that we possess; if we are loyal to it, no power on earth will ever be able to rob us of our crown.

TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

COMMANDMENTS AND COUNSELS

"And when He was gone forth into the way, a certain man running up and kneeling before Him, asked Him: 'Good Master, what shall I do that I may receive life everlasting?' "—Mark x, 17.

I. *Keep the Commandments*—A rich young man came running up to Jesus, and suddenly knelt down before Him. The evangelist undoubtedly recorded these details because they show that the young man had some important matter in his mind; he was anxious, and his anxiety found expression in the words: "What shall I do that I may receive life everlasting?"

This is indeed the greatest question that a man can ask; it reveals his consciousness that his happiness in this life and the next is at stake. There can be no doubt that the young man was in earnest, and so our Lord would certainly give him a clear and decisive answer to his question.

Some people would probably find fault with the man for even asking such a thing, and say: "Do you not know that we can do nothing at all towards securing our salvation; God does everything. Therefore do not ask what you must *do,* but what you must *believe.* Man is justified by faith, without the works of the law."

Did our Saviour speak thus? No, He referred the young man to the law, saying: "Thou knowest the commandments, if thou wilt enter into life, keep them." Then, lest there should be any doubt as to which commandments He meant, our Lord proceeded to quote some of the decalogue. He acted in the same way when a lawyer asked a similar question. "What is written in the law, how readest thou?" said our Lord, and the man replied: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and

with all thy strength, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself." "Thou hast answered right," said our Saviour, "this do, and thou shalt live" (Luke x, 25—28).

Christ's answer to the all-important question is clear enough: "Keep God's commandments, and thou shalt have eternal life." Those who fancy that we can do nothing whatever towards securing life everlasting, would do well to reflect on these words, and on the young man's reply: "All these things I have observed from my youth." If they had been present they would have called him a self-righteous fool, or an arrogant simpleton, for supposing, not only that it was possible to keep God's commandments, but that he had actually done so. They would have told him that he could not keep a single one of the commandments, and that he was a liar when he professed to have kept, not one only, but all. Jesus however did not rebuke the young man in any way; on the contrary we are told that He looked at him and loved him. So many distorted opinions are current regarding faith and works, that it is not surprising if all sorts of ingenious attempts have been made to explain away this passage. Some assert that our Lord did not mean what He said, when He told the young man to keep the commandments. He meant that no one could keep them, and as a result of keeping them could obtain life everlasting. He spoke as He did, in order that the young man might examine himself by the standard of the law, and so make the humiliating discovery that he was incapable of keeping them. Another answer would have been given subsequently, if the man had returned later, and repeated his question with greater humility. This theory is put forward, although no one can adduce a parallel instance showing that Jesus ever acted thus towards people who came to Him. It is impossible to suppose that He ever thought one thing and said another.

He never taught that the end justified the means; He never adopted devious paths by which to reach His goal; He never said what He did not mean; He never was guilty of ambiguity. If He had spoken with the intention ascribed to Him, He would have frustrated His own designs, for nowhere are we told that the rich young man and the lawyer came back to Him. It is quite a mistake to assume that our Lord intentionally concealed His meaning, or at least made it very difficult, if not impossible, for men to discover it. No reasonable father treats his children thus, but puts his orders as plainly as he can; and God, who knows how hard it is for us poor sinners to *do* His will, would never place additional difficulties in our way by presenting it to us in an unintelligible form. If we consider our Lord's words simply, and assign to them their obvious meaning, we learn that we are bound to keep God's commandments, if we wish to enjoy everlasting life. Consequently it must be possible for us to keep them, since God does not impose upon us duties that we are unable to perform. We could not arrive at any other conclusion, even if Christ had spoken less plainly. What should we think of any one who commanded us to fly up to the moon, well knowing that it was an impossibility? We should certainly call him a most unreasonable person, and yet some people assume that God orders us to keep His commandments, knowing that we are quite incapable of doing so. If this were the case, we might say, like the servant in the parable: "Lord—I feared thee because thou art an austere man; thou takest up what thou didst not lay down, and thou reapest that which thou didst not sow."

But this is not the truth, and Jesus tells us that we not only *must* keep the commandments in order to enter into life, but also that we *can* do so. It is our duty simply to accept this statement, but we should misinterpret our Lord's words if we inferred from them

that we are able to keep the Commandments by our own natural powers, or that He requires the most perfect observance of the law as an indispensable condition to the attainment of everlasting life. We may do our duty imperfectly, and still do it. In ordinary language we say of an obedient child that he acts in accordance with his father's will; no one would call him disobedient because his conformity to that will is not absolutely perfect. It may occur to some one to ask whether faith, or the necessity of faith, is excluded by this doctrine that the fulfilment of God's law is indispensable to salvation; in other words, whether Jesus spoke of works, instead of faith, as leading to life eternal. We certainly ought not to answer such a question in the affirmative, for our divine Lord Himself, when asked by the Jews: "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" replied: "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He hath sent." Therefore when He bids us do God's work, if we would enter into life everlasting, Christ refers both to faith and to the keeping of the Commandments. Both together make up God's work, God's law and God's will.

If only men would follow our Lord's example, and be more simple and straightforward in their thoughts and words! Then it would be plain that the faith required of us is living faith, bearing fruit in good works, and that we cannot enter into life with hearts unconverted and stained with sin. The long dispute about faith and works ought to be abandoned; it is already only a matter of words, and happily there are signs that it will ere long be at an end.

II. *"One Thing is Wanting Unto Thee"*—This final admonition to the rich young man must certainly seem strange to those who are unfamiliar with the old interpretation of it given by the Church. "One thing is wanting unto thee: go, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in Heaven; and come,

follow Me."—Can this be required of all who desire to enter into life? In order to avoid this apparently harsh conclusion, recourse is had to all sorts of ingenious explanations. We are told that our Lord was speaking in a spiritual sense, and that the real meaning is: "Keep your possessions, but distribute them spiritually; be detached from all affection to Mammon." But do Christ's plain, emphatic words convey nothing more? Did the young man understand them thus? This explanation seems on a level with that suggested for the miracle at Cana, which appears to be prompted by fear lest the guests might have made a bad use of the wine. In that case we are told that what Jesus provided was spiritual wine! If we assign a spiritual interpretation to our Lord's words to the rich young man, we arrive at a very convenient solution of the difficulty; a man might even continue to be a slave to Mammon, whilst fancying that he was free:—so apt is the human heart to deceive itself.

The real explanation is this: Our Saviour *advises* the rich young man to give away all his possessions, and follow Him in poverty along the way of the Cross; but He does not *demand* this of every one, as a condition indispensable to salvation. In olden times some people assumed that the counsel was addressed to all, and a very great author (Clement of Alexandria) thought it necessary to write a book in defence of riches. No; our Lord does not demand this of every one, any more than during His life on earth He required everyone to follow Him up and down the country, Salvation is possible without such a sacrifice, although it is recommended to those who are capable of making it. "If thou wilt be perfect, do this." The Fathers understand the words thus, and the Church in every age has taught that this is their meaning. It is in harmony with their simple and obvious signification, and we may believe that

we can retain our possessions and yet be saved, although we may not reach the highest perfection. Failure to appreciate the clear distinction between counsels and commandments has led to very disastrous results. The Church has always recognized it, but some have regarded as a commandment, of universal obligation for all who desire to be saved, what was intended to be a counsel, addressed to individuals, and only to be carried out by a special grace of God. This mistake has led to a misunderstanding of Christianity and Christian morality; and people fancy that they have to choose between a total abandonment of Christianity, and an attempt to comply with demands which 99 in every 100 human beings are incapable of fulfilling. How much unhappiness is the result! There are so many, more, probably, than we imagine, whom God calls to labor in His vineyard, and who are ready and eager to do so; yet they give up all hopes of serving Him, because they discover, as they suppose, that it is impossible to lead a Christian life, and that Christianity is all an illusion. They fail to distinguish between commandments and counsels, and come to the conclusion that they cannot comply with a counsel, that they assume to be a commandment. Hence they fall into doubt and despair. Even this despair is not the worst consequence of a doctrine that maintains it to be a matter of strict obligation under all circumstances to discover the highest possible aim, and to use the best means of attaining it. Erroneous teaching on this point has ere now driven many conscientious people out of their minds. "How," they ask, "can I invariably discover with absolute certainty what is the best course?" They torture themselves until their brain power gives way under the strain. We may be quite sure that moral teaching with such results cannot be right.

In other cases it leads to a dull kind of indifference. As soon as

people take it into their heads that it is not enough for them to be good, but that they will not be saved unless they aim at the highest imaginable perfection, they think that it is useless for them to try to do right, since this exalted perfection is beyond their reach. In other words, they set no value on what is good, because it is not the best. Here again we may safely pronounce a form of moral teaching to be bad, if it affords no safeguard against such arguments, and leads to moral indifference. A true comprehension of the distinction between counsels and commandments is of the greatest practical importance.

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

THE RIGHT AND THE WRONG APPLICATION OF THE WORDS: "ALL IS READY"

"Hear ye another parable: There was a man, a householder, who planted a vineyard . . . and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a strange country."—Matt. xxi, 33.

There are three passages in the Gospel with a common fundamental idea, which may be expressed in the words—on God's side, all is ready for us. The marriage feast is ready (Matt. xxii.); the heavenly treasure is ready (Matt. xiii, 44), and the work in God's vineyard awaits us. Let us consider what we may learn from this thought.

I. The wisdom of this world often is incapable of supplying us with any work worthy of an immortal soul; although men labor incessantly to supply the needs of the body, to provide luxuries and comforts, and to gratify sensual desires. Even if they catch occasional glimpses of something higher, everything seems to depend upon their own efforts. They are required not only to choose their aim, but to discover the means and provide themselves with the strength necessary for its attainment, and this they are unable to do.

But it is otherwise in the Kingdom of God, where He prepares for us a task worthy of us in all respects. A householder planted a vineyard, and made a hedge round about it, and dug in it a press, and built a tower—in short he made all preparations for the laborers, who were to be called to work in the vineyard. This means that in the Kingdom of God all is ready for us, and the means requisite for successful work are at our disposal.

Yes, the Church, the Kingdom of God on earth, is prepared to welcome us as laborers. At baptism a child is made the servant of God, and receives power to labor faithfully in the vineyard, with every prospect of receiving the wages due to him at nightfall. If God perceives that one of His servants is unfaithful to his covenant, He seeks to call him back and persuades him to resume work. In His Church He has words of instruction for the ignorant, of warning for the fickle, and of comfort for the weary, oppressed by the burden and heat of the day. He makes ready a banquet in His Church, a holy feast at which He gives us Himself, His own life and His divine and human nature, that He may sanctify our human nature, cleanse and strengthen us and give us fresh strength to work out our own salvation in fear and trembling, strength to labor faithfully unto the end, and so to obtain the crown of life.

Thus on God's side all is ready, and we continually hear His invitation to go and work in His vineyard. In all places His grace encounters us; it is like the air that we breathe, all around us wherever we go, and if we correspond to it, it will make our lives blossom and bear fruit to His honor.

II. The servants are sent *to labor* in the vineyard, in unselfish loyalty towards their Master, who will come at the time of harvest, to receive the fruit. Loyalty requires us to work not for ourselves, but for God.

We are in the vineyard as *workers*. Some do not realize this fact, and, when they hear that all is ready on God's side, assume that nothing is left for them to do. They fancy that faith, even dead faith, is enough; that grace is free, and able to accomplish everything. It pleases them to have recourse to grace, which covers up all sins of heart and life, and casts a veil over all their evil dispositions, so that there is no need for them to bestir themselves, in

order to remove the stains disfiguring their souls, and to lead a holy life. This is an attractive doctrine, and it represents the call to labor in the vineyard as meaning simply that unmerited grace, ascribed or imputed to men, may make them appear good, not that they need exert themselves really to become better. Such a doctrine could be taught only by a man who had altogether failed to understand God's design in preparing everything for us. If on the contrary we believe that it is really our duty to be good, we must not imagine that to become good calls for no effort on our part; we shall find it very hard work, and St. Paul warns us that this will be the case, for he bids us work out our salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. ii, 12), and says: "Let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of the flesh and of the spirit, perfecting sanctification in the fear of God" (2 Cor. vii, 1). It behooves us to remember these words, but at the same time never to forget that God's grace furnishes us with strength to work, since "it is God who worketh in us both to will and to accomplish according to His good will" (Phil. ii, 13). "Not that we are sufficient to think anything of ourselves; but our sufficiency is from God" (2 Cor. iii, 5). Yes indeed we can do all things in Him who strengtheneth us (Phil. iv, 13).

We must not only work, but we must work faithfully, forgetting and denying ourselves. There can be no loyalty without self-denial. Some of the laborers in the vineyard were unwilling to deny themselves, and, being discontented with the wages that they received, they wished to appropriate the revenue of the vineyard; their greed caused them to fall into sin and crime, and they were punished by being deprived of their position.

Our service of God should be true worship aiming at His exaltation and honor, and not exclusively or even primarily at our own

gratification and pleasure. In all our words and actions we must do our duty, not seeking our own will in anything, whether great or small, but trying always to know and accomplish the will of God. If we do this, we shall be faithful servants.

Finally, fidelity will cost us many sacrifices, and our Lord says that none can be His disciple who will not deny himself. The Saints deemed no sacrifice too costly to make for God; do we agree with them? Let us beware of judging others, and be content to examine ourselves; life is made up of sacrifices, and we must all pray that we may offer them to God in purity of heart, and that our Lord will help us to be faithful unto death, so that the Kingdom of God may not be taken away from us.

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

OBSTACLES TO OUR FAITH

"Jesus therefore said to him: 'Unless you see signs and wonders, you believe not.'"—John iv, 48.

1. There was in Capharnaum a centurion, of whom our Lord said: "I have not found so great faith, not even in Israel." But the ruler, of whom we read to-day, received the rebuke: "Unless you see signs and wonders, you believe not." After that, it did not seem as if there were much prospect of his request being granted. Our Saviour required of him absolute faith in His words; He was willing to work a miracle to strengthen the man's faith, but not to be the reason for it. If this ruler had really belonged to the class of those who refused to believe Christ's words, but desires to see His works, and then perhaps to believe, his prayer would certainly not have been granted. The fact however that our Lord did what he wanted, proves that he had at least a glimmer of faith in his heart. He actually displayed his faith, for on hearing the words: "Go thy way, thy son liveth," he "believed the word which Jesus said to him, and went his way." Why did our Lord begin by reproaching him? Let us compare this story with another that resembles it in this respect. The woman of Canaan had to pester our Saviour with her petitions before He said: "Be it done to thee as thou wilt." Why did He act thus, and apparently put obstacles in the way of these two persons? Because in spiritual, as well as in temporal matters, exercise increases our strength. A victor is stronger after a contest than before it. The ruler believed what Christ said, and, as we read that on his return home he himself

believed and his whole house, it is plain that his faith was greatly increased by the miraculous answer to his prayer.

2. Let us consider some of the hindrances in the way of our faith, which, if they do not actually originate with our Lord, are at least permitted and not removed by Him. They are often great trials and bring upon us many reproaches. Many of us have to fight hard for a foothold on the path of faith. Many, like the ruler of old, have prayed earnestly for the life of a child, have offered their supplications in the name of Him who said: "Whatsoever you shall ask the Father in My Name, that will I do"; yet their request is not granted, and the child dies. Then comes the temptation to say: "Is it true that we shall receive whatever we ask in the name of Jesus?" This is in itself a hard trial, but it is not the worst, and St. James supplies the explanation that we need: "You ask and receive not, because you ask amiss" (James iv, 3). In our folly we assume that we are the best judges of what is good for us, and we pray accordingly. We do not follow our Lord's example and say: "Take the chalice from me; nevertheless not my will, but Thine be done." We pray badly, and so we do not receive what we ask.

3. That earthly or temporal favors should be withheld or withdrawn is not however the most painful experience that we may have to undergo. It is far worse to feel that our spiritual and eternal welfare is imperilled. The poor, for instance, often argue thus: "It is all very well for priests to talk about the advantages of poverty, and its power to purify the soul—would they speak in the same way if they had really felt privations, and had suffered hunger and cold as we do? I see no signs of purification as a result of my poverty; on the contrary it makes me bitter, hard and angry. I am tormented by fearful temptations to steal and to deceive and

rob others. I feel inclined to cast aside Christianity and all morality, and to join the anarchists who preach that might is right. All my better qualities are decaying. Are priests exposed to such temptations? If not, it is all very well for them to talk, they know nothing about it."

4. There is however something even worse than this. Sometimes we come across a man who once, perhaps, in the course of an otherwise honest life, has committed a sin that has brought him into the deepest misery; he loses everything, his good name, honor and property, and drags his family down with him into poverty and shame. God seems to have no mercy upon him, even God's justice appears to have failed, and when once a man's faith in Divine Mercy and justice has vanished, nothing but despair remains.

5. What can we say when we encounter misery such as I have been describing? Eloquent phrases are of no avail, and often we feel unable to speak at all, and prefer to keep silence and simply pray for the sufferer, since our feeble attempts at consolation might only aggravate his agony. It may be better to say nothing, and leave the poor soul in God's hands. Occasionally, however, it may do some good to ask: "How can you venture to reproach God for your troubles? Do you know the measure of your guilt so accurately, as to be able to decide what precise degree of punishment you deserve? If we really examine our faults they often prove to be much more serious than we supposed. You say that it is terrible for the innocent to suffer with the guilty; of course this is true, but it is at least possible that the gain to their souls is greater than their loss of temporal happiness. Remember that God's justice is as far above our comprehension as heaven is above the earth. God's mercy also is too high for us ever to understand it fully. Yet it exists, veiled indeed behind dark clouds of sorrow, but ready

to be revealed in all its splendor, when time shall be no more, and we behold everything in the light of God's glory. We must act like the ruler in to-day's gospel, the woman of Canaan, and thousands of Saints, who trusted our Lord's words, even when the waters came in unto their souls. There are in Holy Scripture many words capable of bringing peace and comfort to troubled hearts. In an hour of great anxiety I derived much help from a text in the Psalms: "Thou, O Lord, are a God of compassion, and merciful, patient, and of much mercy, and true" (Ps. lxxxv, 15). Lay hold of such a saying as this, and try to believe. The Lord is merciful and gracious, even when we perceive it least, and feel inclined to think Him the reverse; His mercy will be revealed sooner or later; we shall behold it, and then we shall forget all that we have suffered. Therefore let us pray: "O Lord, Thy mercy shall be sufficient for me. Whether it is displayed in tempest or in calm, in light or in darkness, in sorrow or in consolation, or even, if Thou seest best, in terror, let me never lose faith in Thy mercy; may it be bestowed as Thou wilt; I ask not to perceive it, but only to believe in it." But perhaps some one will retort: "Your advice is good enough, if I could only follow it. You tell me to pray, but I am no longer able to do so; I persevered for a long time, but it was such torture that at last I gave it up. I tried all sorts of prayers in vain; it was no use." My answer in such a case is this: "You cannot pray? Of course you can pray; for prayer is the uplifting of the heart to God, and that can be done without words." Once I saw a woman sitting with a child on her knee at a street corner. They both looked miserably pale and poor, and seemed to be half starved. The woman did not utter a word, nor did she stretch out her hand to beg alms of the passers-by, but she fixed her eyes upon them with a gaze that spoke more plainly than words

could have done. This is how we should behave in our distress; when speech fails, we should enter the presence of God, kneel down before the tabernacle, and reveal to Him our troubles. If we gaze with longing confidence at Him, we have no need of words, and our prayer is sure to be heard.

Follow my advice, and you will go forth with fresh strength to renew the struggle for your salvation.

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

FORGIVING LOVE

"And the Lord of that servant, being moved with pity, let him go and forgave him the debt."—Matt. xviii, 27.

1. *God's forgiving love.*—Ten thousand talents! What a vast sum! It is difficult to see how a servant could possibly have owed his master so much; perhaps the latter was one of those oriental princes whose wealth was often fabulous. Moreover, the servant was no mere laborer, but an official holding some high position, who had gradually borrowed enormous sums of money. No doubt he lived far beyond his means, and could not repay what he borrowed, though he may have intended to do so. He seems not to have kept his accounts in order, and so he had no idea of the extent of his indebtedness to his master, or else he deliberately shut his eyes to it. However this may be, his debt was very large. Is sin always so grave a matter? We speak of a twofold order in the universe—physical and moral. Suppose that a disturbance occurs in the physical order, and that one of the heavenly bodies were to stray from its orbit, and wander about in space. Attracted by some other body, they come into collision and are both dashed to pieces; this would destroy all equilibrium, and other bodies might in consequence be diverted from their orbits and brought into collision, and fearful confusion would result. Yet a disturbance in the moral order is infinitely worse, since the souls of men are more precious than the planets in God's sight. They are designed to be pure and holy, a delight to God and His angels, but every sinful thought, desire and imagination disturbs the order that He wishes to prevail.

Even a wicked look or gesture is enough to stain the soul with sin. An uncharitable word or a bad example has results that no one can foresee. One man infects another with sin, and causes confusion in God's fairest work, the kingdom of souls, where purity, sanctity, peace and joy should reign supreme. How much evil can result from one single sin! and if one sin may have such terrible consequences, what shall we say of a whole life spent in sin?

"He had not wherewith to pay his debt." This is true of the guilt of sin, for whatever good the sinner may have done, is simply his duty, and not a reparation for sin. If we pay for what we buy to-day, we do nothing towards diminishing our debts contracted long ago. The servant certainly deceived himself, if he really believed that he could pay his debt, but we may learn a lesson from his mistake. In one way or another our debts have to be paid. Many people would gladly have their sins forgiven, but are not at all disposed to do penance for them. They are not satisfied with being released from the guilt of their sins, but desire also to escape the temporal punishment due to them, and refuse to listen to any suggestion of penance. They certainly are not contrite, for the best sign of contrition is readiness to accept whatever temporal punishment God may inflict, and even voluntarily to make reparation.

"The lord . . . forgave him the debt." If this seems almost incredible leniency, we must think again of the mode of life at the court of an oriental prince. The Roman emperors occasionally lavished enormous sums on their favorites; Nero gave an eastern prince, who visited him in Rome, 200,000 drachmas every day during his visit, and fifty millions at his departure. The standard by which to measure God's mercy is the magnitude of the sinner's guilt which is remitted. It is only when all our sins are forgiven that we are at peace. Previously we tremble in fear of God's wrath,

but then we begin to love Him, and sanctification, which is inseparable from love, has free scope for action.

2. *Man's forgiving love.*—A hundred denarii or pence amount to about £3-8-0, a very trifling sum in comparison with that which the servant owed his master, so that his repulsive cruelty towards his fellow-servant seems almost incomprehensible. No doubt the remission of his own debt had made him extremely happy for a time, but we must not lay too much stress upon feelings—any one is happy who has been successful in some undertaking. But is not so sudden a change of mood very unusual? By no means; a man may go to church, listen devoutly to the sermon, receive forgiveness in the Sacrament of Penance and even receive Holy Communion, so that he goes home happy and at peace. But what happens in his own house? How does he behave there? Is he irritable at trifles, over-sensitive, devoid of affection and given to rash and uncharitable judgments of others? If so, how can we account for all this? His contrition was perhaps genuine for the moment, but it was very superficial, and based on changeable emotions, rather than on a resolute purpose to become a new man and lead a better life. Where contrition is of this kind, a relapse into sin is inevitable.

Love, forgiving and devoted love, is a sure proof of the genuineness of a man's conversion. God desires us to forgive, that we may be forgiven, and one who truly loves God is ready to forgive his neighbor, since he believes the faults of others to be trivial in comparison with his own. It is not always easy to *feel* love, and this fact ought to be a consolation to some who are inclined to despair. If we have no sensible affection, we can at least do our duty and be guided by God's will. The germ of love is always present in all who honestly try to do right.

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